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GEORGE SEFERIS:

Four Poems

Translated by Edmund Keeley

Stratis the Mariner on the Dead Sea

Sometimes one sees in chapels built on legendary sites the relevant Biblical description quoted in English and beneath it:
"THIS IS THE PLACE GENTLEMEN!"

(Letter of Stratis the Mariner from Jerusalem)
July, 1942

Jerusalem, ungoverned city,
Jerusalem, city of refugees.

Sometimes you see at noon
a flock of scattered black leaves
slipping across the asphalt road—
Migratory birds are passing under the sun
but you don't raise your head.

Jerusalem, ungoverned city!

Unknown tongues of Babel
without relation to the grammar
the legend or the book of psalms
which they taught you to spell out in autumn
when the fishermen tied up at the piers;
unknown tongues glued
like burned-out cigarette butts to decayed lips.

Jerusalem, city of refugees!

But their eyes all speak the same word,
not the word that became man, Lord forgive us,
not the journeys to see new places, but
the dark train of flight where infants
feed on dirt and the sins of their parents
and the middle-aged feel the chasm
broaden between the body,
which lags behind like a wounded camel,
and the soul with its inexhaustible courage, as they say.
It is also the ships that bear them
standing upright like embalmed bishops
in the hold, only to anchor one evening
softly, in the seaweed of the deep.

Jerusalem, ungoverned city!

To the River Jordan
three monks brought
a small red caique
and moored it on the banks.
Three from Mount Athos
sailed for three months
and moored to a branch,
on the Jordan banks,
a refugee's offering.
They hungered three months
they thirsted three months
for three months they didn't sleep
they came from Mount Athos
from Thessalonika
the three enslaved monks.

We are all like the Dead Sea
many fathoms below the surface of the Aegean.
Come with me and I will show you the setting:

In the Dead Sea
there are no fish
there is no seaweed
nor any sea-urchins
there is no life.
There are no creatures
that have a belly
to suffer hunger
that nourish nerves
to suffer pain,
THIS IS THE PLACE, GENTLEMEN!

In the Dead Sea
the wares of scorn
are owned by no one,
are no one's worry.
Heart and thought
congeal in the salt
which is bitter
and join the world
of minerals,
THIS IS THE PLACE, GENTLEMEN!

In the Dead Sea
enemies and friends
wife and children
and relatives,
go and find them there.
They're in Gomorrah
down on the bottom
very happy
that they await
no message.
GENTLEMEN,

and we continue our tour
many fathoms below the surface of the Aegean.

Hampstead

(From "Five Poems of Stratis the Mariner")

Like a bird with broken wing
that had travelled through wind for years
like a bird unable to endure
the tempest and the wind
the evening falls.
On the green grass
three thousand angels had danced the day long
naked as steel
the evening falls pale;
the three thousand angels
gathered in their wings, became
a dog
forgotten
that barks
alone
and seeks its master
or the Second Coming
or a bone.
Now I seek a little quiet
it would be enough to have a hut upon a hill
or by a seashore
enough to have before my window
a sheet immersed in bluing
spread there like the sea
enough to have a false carnation even
in my vase
red paper wound on wire
so that the wind
the wind might govern it with ease
as much as it might wish.
The evening then would fall
the flocks would echo then descending to their fold
like some quite simple happy thought
and I would then lie down to sleep
because I would not have
even a candle to light,
light,
to read.

Monday*

(From "Stratis the Mariner: Notes for a 'Week' ")

(British-grown daffodils)

Among the bending asphodels the blind are sleeping
a people of the blind and the asphodels bend
blackened by the hoarfrost of dawn.
(I remember the paphiopedilums of another winter
enclosed in hothouse heat.
Enough of life).
Their pillows, demolished instruments
rickety phonographs
harmonicas full of holes
organs fallen to their knees;
are they dead?
A motionless blind man cannot be easily distinguished.
Sometimes their dreams come alive, that is why I say they are sleeping.
Round about the houses, the robes of angels beckon me in marble
the river doesn't roll, it has forgotten the sea
and yet there is the sea and who shall drain it dry?
The blind are sleeping,
the angels run naked in their veins
they drink their blood and make them prudent
and the heart with its terrible eyes calculates
how long it will take to run dry.
I look at the river
sudden light puffs of wind pass under the ailing sun
nothing else, the river waits;
pity those who wait.
Nothing else; enough for today.

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* Line 6 is taken from Aeschylus, *Agamemnon,* 1314, and line 16 from the same work, 958. Paphiopedilums are orchids of the Cypripedium group.

Thursday

(From "Stratis the Mariner: Notes for a 'Week' ")

I saw her die many times
sometimes crying in my arms
sometimes in a stranger's arms
alone sometimes, naked;
so she lived near me.
Now at last I know there is nothing further
and I wait.
If I am sorry, it is a private matter
like the feeling for things so simple
that, as they say, one has passed beyond them;
and yet I am sorry still because
I too did not become (as I would have wished)
like the grass I heard sprouting
one night near a pine-tree;
because I did not follow the sea
another night when the waters were withdrawing
gently drinking their own bitterness,
and I did not even understand, as I touched the damp seaweed,
how much honor remains in the palms of men.
All this passed by heavily and finally
like the barges with faded names:
HELEN OF SPARTA, TYRANNUS, GLORIA MUNDI
they passed under the bridges beyond the chimneys
with two stooping men at the prow and stern
naked to the waist;
they passed, I cannot distinguish anything, in the morning fog
the sheep, curled, ruminating, are barely perceptible
nor is the night distinguished by the moon above the river
that is waiting;
only seven lances sunk in water
stagnant, bloodless
and sometimes on the slabs, sadly lit
beneath the squint-eyed castle,
drawn with red and yellow pencil,
the Nazarene—showing his wound.
"Do not throw your heart to the dogs.
Do not throw your heart to the dogs."
Her voice now sinks with the striking of the clock;
your will, I sought your will.

EDMUND KEELEY:

George Seferis and Stratis the Mariner

Since T. S. Eliot's review of Joyce's *Ulysses* in *The Dial* (Nov., 1923), the phrase "mythical method" has become a convenient designation for a traditional technique that Eliot himself did much to revivify: the manipulation of "a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" in order to give "a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history." In Eliot's time, however, the writer (as well as the critic) has become too conscious, perhaps, of the mythical method as *method*. The reader of Pound's "Canto XXXIX," for example, is more aware of the poet's manipulation of myth than he is of its significance; the poet here exhibits a rather self-conscious preoccupation with form. Eliot himself concludes his discussion of *Ulysses* with the excitement of discovery—not of a new passion or intelligence, but a new method; he exclaims: "Instead of the narrative method, we may now use the mythical method." And so we may, but it is refreshing to discover one contemporary poet, George Seferis, who does so more by instinct than design, more from a sense of personal identity with the mythology he uses, than a sense of its novelty as a means, as a method of ordering the disorder of an alien vision. Seferis has, of course, an advantage over Eliot and Pound in that he is a native of Greece, where one can still hear echoes of Homer in the village square, where one can plow within sight of ancient temples and their gods, where one can see the cunning and the longing of Odysseus in the sea captain who has been known to recite, with tears in his eyes, all 10,052 verses of the Cretan epic-romance called the *Erotocritos*.

It is perhaps this sea captain, the ghost of Odysseus, "father" of the poet, who speaks as Stratis the Mariner throughout Seferis's poetry. He is related to the "voice" in the two long poems, *Mythical Story* and *"The Thrush,"* and he serves as the poet's mask in many of the shorter lyrics. Seferis first describes him in "On a Foreign Verse" (1931); the sense of kinship between Odysseus and the poet, between the mythical hero and the mariners of Seferis's childhood in Smyrna, is apparent in the following excerpt:

It is the great Odysseus; he who had them build the wooden horse
and so the Achaeans conquered Troy.
I imagine he is coming to explain how I too may build a wooden
horse to conquer my Troy.

Because he speaks humbly and peacefully, without effort, one might
say he knows me like a father
or like certain aged mariners, who, leaning against their nets, at a
time when the wind began to rage with the fury of winter,

recited to me, in my childhood, the song of Erotocritos with tears
in their eyes . . .

The captain tells the poet about "the torment you feel when the sails of your ship are inflated by memory"; about "the bitterness of seeing your companions submerged by the elements, scattered: one by one"; about "how strangely your courage returns in talking to the dead, when the living who are left to you no longer suffice." These three themes, suggested by the Odyssey myth, are among the most insistent in Seferis's poetry; they are sentiments shared by the wandering exile of all ages, but became particularly familiar to this poet after the loss of his home in the Asia Minor disaster of 1922 and during his years away from Greece both in the diplomatic service and as an official in the exiled Greek Government of World War II. The longing of Odysseus for the return voyage to Ithaca and his memories of a distant home haunt the "I" of *Mythical Story* and *"The Thrush."* Friends and relatives lost or changed, weak companions submerged or dying, are ever on the mind of Seferis's hero. As late as "Stratis the Mariner on the Dead Sea," written eleven years after the poem quoted above, we find:

In the Dead Sea
enemies and friends
wife and children
and relatives
go and find them there.

Again in "Stratis the Mariner among the Agapanthi" (1942), our modern Odysseus bemoans the fate of his "poor, idiotic" companion Elpenor, who broke his neck in a drunken fall from the roof of Circe's palace. Stratis here echoes the sea captain of "On a Foreign Verse" when he cries:

> It is cumbersome and difficult, those alive do not suffice
> first because they do not speak, and then
> because I have to ask the dead
> before I can advance.

But the dead know "the language of flowers only," and Stratis finds himself among agapanthi (African lilies) in Transvaal during the war, exiled from Homer's asphodel plain *(Od.* XI). As a Greek, Stratis knows well the language of asphodels, violets, and hyacinths, but here he finds only agapanthi and he cannot speak in the tongue of agapanthi. So the dead remain silent, without offering him the guidance that will make the homeward journey possible.

The same Homeric nostalgia, the same frustration and alienation, inform the early "Five Poems of Stratis the Mariner" (1931) and "Stratis the Mariner: Notes for a 'Week'" (1933), written during Seferis's first diplomatic assignment to London. The poet gives a revealing account of his initial reaction to London in a tribute which he wrote for *T. S. Eliot: a Symposium:*

> I remember the time—it now seems so long ago—when I was making my first faltering discovery of London, which I thought of as a gigantic sea-port. . . . Also, the shock I experienced at the sour taste of death in the fog, and the intensified circulation of fear in the arteries of the great city. Death, I kept thinking, is for us a sudden wound; here it is a slow poison. I carried with me a great nostalgia, which was awakened on many occasions by the kind of formless sensitivity and patient, really rather cold politeness with which I was surrounded. I had no friends in England then. My only acquaintances were the crowds in the streets and the museums. . . . I often had to rush out of my house to see again a fragment of the Greek marbles . . . or a small portrait by El Greco at the National Gallery.

There is something of this mood in the poem subtitled "Hampstead," where the landlocked Stratis the Mariner longs for "a sheet immersed in bluing" to spread before his window "like the sea," and "a small carnation even" that would move in the wind, stirring with its motion a recollection of flocks descending to the fold in a distant homeland. In "Notes for a 'Week': Thursday," the sheep are barely perceptible in the morning fog, and in "Monday" of the same group, the asphodels are blackened by the hoarfrost of dawn. It is apparent in these poems that Stratis the Mariner has also come to know "the sour taste of death" in the London fog and cannot reconcile the gigantic river

"sea-port" before him and a fading vision of his own Mediterranean sea. The voice of these poems anticipates the nostalgic cry which opens a later work, "In the Manner of G. S.": "Wherever I may journey, Greece still wounds me."

A constant source, really a symbol, of Stratis's nostalgia is the woman who appears in "Notes for a 'Week': Thursday":

> I saw her die many times
> sometimes crying in my arms
> sometimes in a stranger's arms
> alone sometimes, naked;
> so she lived near me.

This woman first appears in "Song of Love" (1930) as an apparition out of the past that comes to haunt the poem's hero with memories of an intensely sensual experience, a union, achieved at the height of fate's rising cycle and then suddenly destroyed with the downward cycle, "the cycle which brings the sorrows." The intensity of the experience is lost in "the rocking of a foreign embrace," but the memory of it persists as a heavy, recurrent rhythm—at the end of this poem and throughout the travels of the modern Odysseus. In "Stratis the Mariner Describes a Man," the man described reports: "you know, I love a woman who left for the underworld," and a bit later, "I loved a girl . . . . I think they called her Vaso, Froso, or Bilio; so I forgot the sea." The apparition appears again in "15" of *Mythical Story;* it has become even less tangible than it was in "Song of Love," the fractured form of silence which the poet cannot touch and which returns, as quickly as it came, to the shadows of another world:

> Beneath the plane-tree, near the water, amidst the laurel
> sleep removed you and scattered you
> around me, near me, without enabling me to touch the whole of you
> joined to your silence;
> seeing your shadow grow and diminish
> then lose itself in the other shadows, in the other world
> which released you and held you.

Seferis's latest poem, "Engomi" (1955), concludes with an apotheosis of the woman figure. She rises out of the level plain at Engomi, "with the unripe breasts of the Virgin, /a dance motionless," to vanish in the womb of the sky like an Assumption; again the poet's memory is stirred by a vision of "breasts among leaves, lips moist." This

fusion of the sensual and the spiritual, of the tangible and the intangible, characterizes the figure whenever she appears. To Stratis the Mariner she is an image of love's highest ecstasy, an image of "the other world" where love cuts time in two and where the heart has not been turned to marble by insensitivity or frustration, a world which Stratis-Odysseus longs for and seeks during his exile but which he reaches only in memory.

This brief account of Seferis's hero might seem to substantiate the poet's own view of himself expressed in an essay on *"The Thrush":* "I am a monotonous and obstinate man who for twenty years . . . have not ceased to say the same things again and again." A more just view is that Seferis's poems constitute one long work, a modern *Odyssey,* in which unity and coherence are achieved by the repetition of related motifs and the presence, always, of the same central intelligence or sensibility. This central intelligence is sometimes called Stratis the Mariner, sometimes merely "I." As an heir to the ancient wandering hero, he serves as the voice for all men of our age who are tormented by the longings and temptations, the remembered joys, of the wanderer on a seemingly endless journey. The fact that the voice sings with a rich and moving sadness is evidence that the mythical method can still offer more than the excitement of technical virtuosity when manipulated without self-consciousness by the sensitive poetic mind.

GRACE PALEY:

Goodbye and Good Luck

I was popular in certain circles, says Aunt Rose. I wasn't no thinner then, only more stationary in the flesh. In time to come, Lillie, don't be surprised—change is a fact of God. From this, no one is excused. Only a person like your mama stands on one foot, she don't notice how big her behind is getting, and sings in the canary's ear for thirty years. Who's listening? Papa's in the shop. You and Seymour, thinking about yourself. So she waits in a spotless kitchen for a kind word and thinks,—poor Rosie—.

Poor Rosie! If there was more life in my little sister, she would know my heart is a regular college of feelings and there is such information between my corset and me that her whole married life is a kindergarten.

Nowadays, you could find me anytime in a hotel, uptown or downtown. Who needs an apartment to live like a maid with a dustrag in the hand, sneezing? I'm in very good with the bellboys, it's more interesting than home, all kinds of people, everybody with a reason. . . .

And my reason, Lillie, is a long time ago I said to the forelady, "Missus, if I can't sit by the window, I can't sit." "If you can't sit, girlie," she says politely, "go stand on the street corner." And that's how I got unemployed in novelty wear.

For my next job, I answered an ad which said: "Refined young lady, medium salary, cultural organization." I went by trolley to the address, the Russian Art Theater of Second Avenue where they played only the best Yiddish plays.

They needed a ticket seller, someone like me, who likes the public but is very sharp on crooks. The man who interviewed me was the manager, a certain type.

Immediately he said: "Rosie Lieber, you surely got a build on you!"

"It takes all kinds, Mr. Krimberg."

"Don't misunderstand me, little girl," he said. "I appreciate, I appreciate. A young lady lacking fore and aft, her blood is so busy warming the toes and the fingertips, it don't have time to circulate where it's most required."

Everybody likes kindness. I said to him: "Only don't be fresh, Mr. Krimberg, and we'll make a good bargain."

We did: Nine dollars a week, a glass of tea every night, a free ticket once a week for mama, and I could go watch rehearsals any time I want.

My first nine dollars was in the grocer's hands ready to move on already, when Krimberg said to me: "Rosie, here's a great gentleman, a member of this remarkable theater, wants to meet you, impressed no doubt by your big brown eyes."

And who was it, Lillie? Listen to me, before my very eyes was Volodya Vlashkin, called by the people of those days the Valentino of Second Avenue.

I took one look and I said to myself, where did a Jewish boy grow up so big? "Just outside Kiev," he told me.

How? "My mama nursed me till I was six. I was the only boy in the village to have such health."

"My goodness, Vlashkin, six years old! She must have had shredded wheat there, not breasts, poor woman."

"My mother was beautiful," he said. "She had eyes like stars."

He had such a way of expressing himself, it brought tears.

To Krimberg, Vlashkin said after this introduction: "Who is responsible for hiding this wonderful young person in a cage?"

"That is where the ticket seller sells."

"So David, go in there and sell tickets for a half hour. I have something in mind in regards to the future of this girl and this company. Go David, be a good boy. And you, Miss Lieber, please, I suggest Feinbergs for a glass of tea. The rehearsals are long. I enjoy a quiet interlude with a friendly person."

So he took me there, Feinbergs, then around the corner, a place so full of Hungarians, it was deafening. In the back room was a table of honor for him. On the table cloth, embroidered by the lady of the house, was Here Vlashkin Eats. We finished one glass of tea in quietness out of thirst, when I finally made up my mind what to say.

"Mr. Vlashkin, I saw you a couple weeks ago even before I started working here, in *The Sea Gull*. Believe me, if I was that girl, I wouldn't look even for a minute on the young bourgeois fellow. He could fall out of the play altogether. How Chekhov could put him in the same play as you, I can't understand."

"You liked me?" he asked, taking my hand and kindly patting it. "Well, well, young people still like me,—so, and you like the theater too? Good. And you, Rose, you know you have such a nice hand, so warm to the touch, such a fine skin, tell me, why do you

wear a scarf around your neck? You only hide your young, young throat. These are not olden times, my child, to live in shame."

"Who's ashamed?" I said, taking off the kerchief, but my hand right away went to the kerchief's place, because the truth is, it really was olden times, and I was still of a nature to melt with shame.

"Have some more tea, my dear."

"No thank you, I am a samovar already."

"Dorfmann!" he hollered like a king. "Bring this child a seltzer with fresh ice!"

In weeks to follow, I had the privilege to know him better and better as a person—also the opportunity to see him in his profession. The time was autumn; the theater full of coming and going. Rehearsing without end. After *The Sea Gull* flopped, *The Salesman From Istanbul* played, a great success.

Here the ladies went crazy. On the opening night, in the middle of the first scene, one missus, a widow or her husband worked too long hours, began to clap and sing out, "Oi, oi, Vlashkin." Soon there was such a tumult, the actors had to stop acting. Vlashkin stepped forward. Only not Vlashkin to the eyes . . . a younger man with pitch-black hair, lively on restless feet, his mouth clever. A half a century later at the end of the play he came out again, a grey philosopher, a student of life, from only reading books, his hands as smooth as silk. I cried to think who I was—nothing—and such a man could look at me with interest.

Then I got a small raise due to he kindly put in a good word for me and also, for fifty cents a night, I was given the privilege together with cousins, in-laws and plain stagestruck kids to be part of a crowd scene. This was for me a special pleasure, to stand behind his back and hear him breathe.

The sad day came, I kissed my mama goodbye. Vlashkin helped me to get a reasonable room near the theater to be more free. Also my outstanding friend would have a place to recline away from the noise of the dressing rooms. She cried and she cried. "This is a different way of living, Mama," I said. "Besides, I am driven by love."

"You! you! a nothing, a rotten hole in a piece of cheese, are you telling me what is life?" she screamed.

Very insulted, I went away from her. But I am good-natured, you know fat people are like that, kind, and I thought to myself, poor mama . . . it is true she got more of an idea of life than me. She married who she didn't like, a sick man, his spirit already swallowed

up by God. He never washed. He had an unhappy smell. His teeth fell out, his hair disappeared, he got smaller, shriveled up little by little, till goodbye and good luck he was gone and only came to mama's mind when she went to the mailbox under the stairs to get the electric bill. In memory of him and out of respect for mankind, I decided to live for love.

Don't laugh, you ignorant girl.

Do you think it was easy for me? I had to give mama a little something. Ruthie was saving up together with your papa for linens, a couple of knives and forks. In the morning I had to do piecework if I wanted to keep by myself. So I made flowers. Before lunchtime every day a whole garden grew on my table.

This was my independence, Lillie dear, blooming, but it didn't have no roots and its face was paper.

Meanwhile Krimberg went after me too. No doubt observing the success of Vlashkin, he thought, "Aha, Open Sesame. . . ." Others in the company similar. After me in those years were the following: Krimberg I mentioned. Carl Zimmer, played innocent young fellows with a wig. Charles Peel, a Christian who fell in the soup by accident, a creator of beautiful sets. "Color is his middle name," says Vlashkin, always to the point.

I put this in to show you your fat old aunt was not crazy out of loneliness. In those noisy years, I had friends among interesting people who admired me for reasons of youth and that I was a first-class listener.

The actresses, Raisele, Marya, Esther Leopold, were only interested in tomorrow. After them was the rich men, producers, the whole garment center, their past is a pin cushion, future the eye of a needle.

Finally the day came I no longer could keep my tact in my mouth. I said: "Vlashkin, I hear by carrier-pigeon you have a wife, children, the whole combination."

"True, I don't tell stories. I make no pretence."

"That isn't the question. What is this lady like? It hurts me to ask, but tell me, Vlashkin . . . a man's life is something I don't clearly see."

"Little girl, I have told you a hundred times, this small room is the convent of my troubled spirit. Here I come to your innocent shelter to refresh myself in the midst of an agonized life."

"Ach, Vlashkin, serious, serious, who is this lady?"

"Rosie, she is a fine woman of the middle classes, a good mother

to my children, three in number, girls all, a good cook, in her youth handsome, now no longer young. You see, could I be more frank? I entrust you, dear, with my soul."

It was some months later at the New Year's Ball of the Russian Artists Club, I met Mrs. Vlashkin, a woman with black hair in a low bun, straight and too proud, she sat at a small table speaking in a deep voice to whoever stopped a moment to converse. Her Yiddish was perfect, each word cut like a special jewel. I looked at her. She noticed me like she noticed everybody, cold like Christmas morning. Then she got tired. Vlashkin called a taxi and I never saw her again. Poor woman, she did not know I was on the same stage with her. The poison I was to her role, she did not know.

Later on that night in front of my door, I said to Vlashkin, "No more. This isn't for me. I am sick from it all. I am no home-breaker."

"Girlie," he said, "don't be foolish."

"No, no, goodbye, good luck," I said. "I am sincere."

So I went and stayed with mama for a week's vacation and cleaned up all the closets and scrubbed the walls till the paint came off. She was very grateful, all the same her hard life made her say, "Now we see the end. If you live like a bum, you are finally a lunatic."

After this few days, I came back to my life. When we met, me and Vlashkin, we said only hello and goodbye, and then for a few sad years with the head we nodded as if to say, "Yes, yes, I know who you are."

Meanwhile in the field was a whole new strategy. Your mama and grandmama brought around—boys.

Your own father had a brother, you never even seen him. Ruben. A serious fellow, his idealism was his hat and his coat. "Rosie, I offer you a big new free happy unusual life." How? "With me, we will raise up the sands of Palestine to make a nation. That is the land of tomorrow for us Jews." "Ha, ha, Ruben, I'll go tomorrow then." "Rosie!" says Ruben. "We need strong women like you, mothers and farmers." "You don't fool me, Ruben, what you need is dray horses. But for that you need more money." "I don't like your attitude, Rose." "In that case, go and multiply. Goodbye."

Another fellow: Yonkel Gurstein, a regular sport, dressed to kill, with such an excitable nature. In those days, it looks to me like yesterday, the youngest girls wore undergarments like Battle Creek, Michigan. To him it was a matter of seconds. Where did he practice, a Jewish boy? Nowadays, I suppose it is easier, Lillie? My goodness, I ain't asking you nothing,—touchy, touchy.

Well, by now you must know yourself, honey, whatever you do, life don't stop. It only sits a minute and dreams a dream.

While I was saying to all these silly youngsters—no, no, no, Vlashkin went to Europe and toured a few seasons—Moscow, Prague, London, even Berlin, already a pessimistic place. When he came back, he wrote a book you could get from the library even today, *The Jewish Actor Abroad*. If some day you're interested enough in my lonesome years, you could read it. You could absorb a flavor of the man from the book. No, no, I am not mentioned. After all, who am I?

When the book came out, I stopped him in the street to say congratulations. But I am not a liar, so I pointed out too the egotism of many parts,—even the critics said something along such lines.

"Talk is cheap," Vlashkin answered me. "But who are the critics, tell me do they create? Not to mention," he continues, "there is a line in Shakespeare in one of the plays from the great history of England, it says . . . 'self-loving is not so vile a sin, my liege, as self-neglecting.' This idea also appears in modern times in the moralistic followers of Freud.

"Rosie, are you listening? You asked a question. By the way, you look very well. How come no wedding ring?" I walked away from this conversation in tears. But this talking in the street opened the happy road up for more discussions. In regard to many things. For instance, the management—very narrow-minded—wouldn't give him any more certain young men's parts. Fools. What youngest man knew enough about life to be as young as him?

"Rosie, Rosie," he said to me one day. "I see by the clock on your rosy, rosy face, you must be thirty."

"The hands are slow, Vlashkin. On a week before Thursday I was thirty-four."

"Is that so? Rosie, I worry about you. It has been on my mind to talk to you. You are losing your time. Do you understand it? A woman should not lose her time."

"Oi Vlashkin, if you are my friend, what is time?"

For this, he had no answer, only looked at me surprised. We went instead, full of interest but not with our former speed, up to my new place on 94th Street. The same pictures on the wall, all of Vlashkin, only now everything painted red and black which was stylish, and new upholstery.

A few years ago there was a book by another member of that fine company, an actress, the one that learned English very good and

went uptown—Marya Kavkaz, in which she says certain things regarding Vlashkin.

Such as, he was her lover for eleven years, she's not ashamed to write this down. Without respect for him, his wife and children or even others who also may have feelings in the matter.

Now, Lillie, don't be surprised. This is called a fact of life. An actor's soul must be like a diamond. The more faces it got, the more shining is his name. Honey, you will no doubt love and marry one man and have a couple kids and be happy forever till you die tired. More than that, a person like us don't have to know. But a great artist like Volodya Vlashkin . . . in order to make a job on the stage, he's got to practice. I understand it now, to him life is like a rehearsal.

Myself, when I saw him in *The Father-in-Law,* an older man in love with a darling young girl, his son's wife, played by Raisele Maisel —I cried. What he said to this girl, how he whispered such sweetness, how all his hot feelings were on his face . . . . Lillie, all this experience he had with me. The very words were the same. You can imagine how proud I was.

So the story creeps to an end.

I noticed it first on my mother's face, the rotten handwriting of time, scribbled up and down her cheeks, across her forehead back and forth—a child could read—it said, old, old, old. But it troubled my heart most to see these realities scratched on Vlashkin's wonderful expression.

First the company fell apart. The theater ended. Esther Leopold died from being very aged. Krimberg had a heart attack. Marya went to Broadway. Also Raisele changed her name to Roslyn and was a big comical hit in the movies.

Vlashkin himself, no place to go, retired. It said in the paper: ". . . an actor without peer, he will write his memoirs and spend his last years in the bosom of his family among his thriving grandchildren, the apple of his wife's doting eye."

This is journalism.

We made for him a great dinner of honor. At this dinner, I said to him for the last time I thought, "Goodbye, dear friend, topic of my life, now we part."

And to myself I said further: Finished. This is your lonesome bed. A lady what they call fat and fifty. You made it personally. From this lonesome bed you will finally fall to a bed not so lonesome.

And now comes? Lillie, guess.

Last week, washing my underwear in the basin, I get a buzz on the phone.

"Excuse me, is this the Rose Lieber formerly connected with the Russian Art Theater?"

"It is."

"Well, well, how do you do, Rose? This is Vlashkin."

"Vlashkin! Volodya Vlashkin?"

"In fact. How are you, Rose?"

"Living, Vlashkin, thank you."

"You are all right? Really, Rose? Your health is good? You are working?"

"My health, considering the weight it must carry, is first class. I am back for some years now where I started, in novelty wear."

"Very interesting."

"Listen, Vlashkin, tell me the truth, what's on your mind?"

"My mind? Rosie, I am looking up an old friend, an old warm-hearted companion of more joyful days. My circumstances by the way are changed. I am retired as you know. Also I am a free man."

"What? What do you mean?"

"Mrs. Vlashkin is divorcing me."

"What came over her? Did you start drinking or something from melancholy?"

"She is divorcing me for adultery."

"But Vlashkin, you should excuse me, don't be insulted, but you got maybe seventeen, eighteen years on me and even me, all this nonsense, this daydreams and nightmares, is mostly for the pleasure of conversation alone."

"I pointed all this out to her. My dear, I said, my time is past, my blood is as dry as my bones. The truth is, Rose, she isn't accustomed to have a man around all day, reading out loud from the papers the interesting events of our time, waiting for breakfast, waiting for lunch. So all day she gets madder and madder. By night time a furious old lady gives me my supper. She has information from the last fifty years to pepper my soup. Surely there was a Judas in that theater saying every day, 'Vlashkin, Vlashkin, Vlashkin' . . . and while my heart was circulating with his smiles he was on the wire passing the dope to my wife."

"Such a foolish end, Volodya, to such a lively story. What is your plans?"

"First, could I ask you for dinner and the theater—uptown of

course? After this . . . we are old friends. I have money to burn. What your heart desires. Others are like grass, the north wind of time has cut out their heart. Of you, Rosie, I recreate only kindness. What a woman should be to a man, you were to me. Do you think, Rosie, a couple of old pals like us could have a few good times among the material things of this world?"

My answer, Lillie, in a minute was altogether yes, yes, come up, I said, ask the room by the switchboard, let us talk.

So he came that night and every night in the week. We talked of his long life. Even at the end of time, a fascinating man. And like men are too till time's end, trying to get away in one piece.

"Listen, Rosie," he explains the other day. "I was married to my wife, do you realize nearly half a century. What good was it? Look at the bitterness. The more I think of it, the more I think we would be fools to marry."

"Volodya Vlashkin," I told him straight, "when I was young, I warmed your cold back many a night no questions asked. You admit it, I didn't make no demands. I was soft-hearted. I didn't want to be called Rosie Lieber a breaker up of homes. But now, Vlashkin, you are a free man. How could you ask me to go with you on trains to stay in strange hotels, among Americans, not your wife? Be ashamed."

So now, darling Lillie, tell this story to your mama from your young mouth. She don't listen to a word from me. She only screams, "I'll faint, I'll faint." Tell her, after all I'll have a husband which, as everybody knows, a woman should have at least one before the end of the story.

My goodness, I am already late. Give me a kiss. After all, I watched you grow from a plain seed. So give me a couple wishes on my wedding day. A long and happy life. Many years of love. Hug mama, tell her from Aunt Rose, goodbye and good luck.

CYNTHIA GRENIER:

The Art of Fiction

An Interview with William Faulkner—September, 1955

Scene: The broad green lawn at the back of the U. S. Information Service building in Paris on a warm Indian summer morning in late September. William Faulkner, stretched out on the grass in his Brooks Brothers blue shirtsleeves, nurses his pipe. On the grass beside him the interviewer. Faulkner is a handsome man with a well-brushed head of white hair, tanned face, very alert black-brown eyes under epicanthic lids. His chin juts up and out meeting the world directly and defiantly. His bearing and appearance belie his fifty-eight years. He speaks in a soft, slow voice with what could be called an educated Southern accent. Sometimes his sentences are short—" 'cause I do"—and other times when he is speaking of his craft or his beliefs fine long involved rhetorical sentences roll out, as they do in his prose. He seldom takes the initiative in conversation, waiting without seeming to wait for the other person to talk. He has a distaste for journalists and official interviews, but shows a genuine enthusiasm and interest in responding to, as he terms them, "young folks' questions." At a press conference held a few days earlier, when faced with detailed questions from newspapermen on his philosophy and works, he had replied repeatedly, "I'm not a literary man; I'm just a farmer." But being a "literary" man and being a writer are two different things to him, and Faulkner does admit to being a writer and will, sometimes, talk about his craft. His manner, which is a combination of shyness and defensiveness, places an interviewer on his honor not to probe the forbidden areas—"literary" analysis of his works, symbolic content—but to seek rather to make contact on a human level. While talking or listening, Faulkner smokes his pipe, from time to time filling it almost automatically from a yellow oilskin pouch. He gives a sense of unity and great internal reserve about his person. In spite of this reserve, Faulkner emanates throughout the interview a very considerably engaging quiet charm which succeeds in being courtly and puckish at the same time.

INT: How do you feel about being in Paris now?

WF: Why, I like it fine. France and Italy are two of my favorite countries. I feel Paris is a kind of home for me. It's a part of everyone's cultural background. There's the liberty here to be an artist. It's in the air.

INT: How about you—have you ever thought of writing here?

WF: Oh, I couldn't. I'd have too much fun here to ever work. (With little side grin to interviewer.)

INT: Do you keep up with any of the writing being done today by your contemporaries or younger writers?

WF: No, I don't. Haven't read any new writing in the last ten or fifteen years. But I've been doing more reading lately than I used to, having more time, and I expect to do even more once I get back home. I want to read the new books being written today. I'm having a whole load of books shipped home for me from Japan. And another from Italy from the young Italian writers. I expect to do the same for the French. (Pausing thoughtfully, drawing on his pipe.) Books I do read are the ones I've known for years. The Old Testament, Dickens, Flaubert, Balzac, Dostoevski, Tolstoi, Shakespeare. But they're old friends. Don't read them straight through any more. I can just dip in anywhere when I want to. *Moby Dick, Don Quixote, Huck Finn, Madame Bovary, Brothers Karamazov,* they're all old friends of mine.

INT: Just to take one of those authors you mentioned at random, what is it about Balzac that you like?

WF: I like the fact that in Balzac there is an intact world of his own. His people don't just move from page one to page 320 of one book. There is continuity between them all like a blood-stream which flows from page one through to page 20,000 of one book. The same blood, muscle and tissue binds the characters together.

INT: How about poetry? Do you read much poetry?

WF: Yes. But no new poets. I have my old friends which I still read over. Keats, Shelley, Byron, the Elizabethans, Marlowe, Thomas Campion; the French poets, Verlaine and Laforgue. I think that every novelist is a failed poet. I think he tries to write poetry first, then finds he can't. Then he tries the short story, which is the most demanding form after poetry. And failing at that, only then does he take up novel-writing.

INT: Do you have any writer in mind when you say this?

WF (looking at interviewer): I'm a failed poet. I tried writing

poetry when I was a young man, but I soon found I wasn't a poet. So I turned to the novel.

INT: I'd like to ask one more question on your reading, if I may, do you read detective stories?

WF: Well, I like a good one like *Brothers Karamazov.*

INT (a little hesitant): Well, I was thinking of *Knight's Gambit.*

WF: Oh. I think you can learn a lot from Simenon's stories. They're so much like Chekhov's.

INT: I guess maybe I'd better read Chekhov again.

(WF and Interviewer eye each other a minute.)

INT (starting up again): You've often said that primarily you were a farmer (Faulkner nods), but you did quite a few other things before you settled to being a writer-farmer, didn't you?

WF: That's right. I was a house-painter, a pilot, a bootlegger, and did a lot of other odd jobs. When my father died the responsibility for the family fell on me. Until then, I worked at any job which would bring me money when I wanted or needed money. For instance, after the First World War, aviation was new. People were willing to pay up to $100 to go up in a plane. You didn't need any license to practice this activity. As flying got more regimented and as there got to be more planes, it got less interesting and you earned less money at it, so I left it.

INT: You've mentioned several times before that you were a house-painter. Does that particular profession have any special importance for you?

WF: It was a terrible one for me, 'cause I couldn't stand the smell of paint. It made me sick, but it paid well. (Long pause, Faulkner drawing on pipe.) I used to be a bootlegger running raw liquor on a power boat from Cuba into New Orleans when I met Sherwood Anderson. We used to sit around every afternoon with two or three bottles of whiskey, laughing and talking about people. Next morning Sherwood would be in seclusion for about four hours, and next afternoon we'd sit around talking and drinking again. And next morning Sherwood would be in seclusion again. So I thought to myself that was as pleasant a life as was possible to lead. I'd found I liked to write already, so one day I sat down and started writing. After about a week, Anderson came over to my place, which was pretty nice of him, as he'd never done that before. He asked "What's wrong? You mad at me?" I said I was writing a novel. He said, "My God!" and walked off. A few weeks later, I met Mrs. Anderson, who said, "Sherwood has a message for you. He says if you won't make him read the book,

he'll send it to his publishers with his recommendation." And when I had it finished in three months, he sent it off.

INT: That was *Soldiers' Pay?*

WF: Yes, that's right. . . . After I'd sent it off, I decided to go to Europe, shipping out of New Orleans as a deckhand on a freighter. When I arrived in Paris a month later, I found a check from my publishers for $200. And do you know, I didn't have a cent then, but I couldn't get that check cashed for more than three months. I just had to carry it around with me, and look at it sometimes.

INT: What do you think about the position of the young writer today, and the fact that, at least for short stories, he has fairly limited outlets?

WF: A young writer shouldn't ought to think too much about success. Shouldn't really think about it at all. (Sitting up, emphatically.) Success is feminine. It's like a woman. You treat her with contempt and she'll come after you, all fawning and eager, but chase after her and she'll scorn you. (Pauses, filling pipe.) You know, I wish I were a big foundation or was like one of those Renaissance princes. I'd like to take over a big house for young writers and painters. The painters, they'd each one get one canvas and enough paints and brushes to paint on it, and the writers'd get a ream of paper and a typewriter. Or pencils or a pen, whatever they'd think best with. And when they'd filled that canvas or that paper, why then they could come and get some more. They'd get their room and board, and a little extra money for cigarettes, liquor and maybe a new dress once in a while for the girls to keep morale up, you know. But every year they'd have to turn out a novel or a painting. Maybe more than one, but at least one every year. (Lighting pipe.) Yes, too bad I'm not a foundation.

INT: Do you think also that it would be profitable for their work to have all these writers and painters living together so that they might share ideas, and exchange criticism?

WF: No, I don't. An artist shouldn't talk too much. If he talks then he works that much less. This way, with them all living together in the same house all the time, they'd get themselves talked out pretty fast, and then they'd spend all their time working.

INT: Don't you ever, or didn't you ever, want to or feel the need to discuss your writing with anyone?

WF: No. No one but me knew what I was writing about or writing from. I always knew whether what I'd done was right and good or not. There wasn't anyone who could tell me that. If I thought

it was right, then it didn't make any difference to me what anyone else thought.

INT: In view of your feeling on this matter, how do you feel when you hear or read about various critics and writers discussing your unconscious meanings, your symbolic content, and so forth?

WF (emphatically): Never read 'em. . . . But it does sort of amuse me when I hear 'em talking about the sociological picture that I present in something like *As I Lay Dying,* for instance.

INT: This is a rather big order question, but how do your ideas come to you? How do you shape your novels?

WF: There's always a moment in experience—a thought—an incident—that's there. Then all I do is work up to that moment. I figure what must have happened before to lead people to that particular moment, and I work away from it, finding out how people act after that moment. That's how all my books and stories come. I don't believe in inspiration. I always write out of my personal experience, out of events I've been present at, out of stories I've heard from people. (Pausing.) I think people try to find more in my work than I've put there. I like to tell stories, to create people and situations. But that's all. I doubt if an author knows what he puts in a story. All he is trying to do is to tell what he knows about his environment and the people around him in the most moving way possible. He writes like a carpenter uses his tools. . . . Like violence. Violence is just a tool I use to tell something the best way I am capable of telling it. If I could I would write all my books again, and I think I could do them better. But I don't think I'd be satisfied with them. I don't think any author can be satisfied with his work. If he were, there'd be nothing left for him to do but cut his throat. (Draws finger across throat.) Being a writer is having the worst vocation. You're demon-run, under compulsion, always being driven. It's a lonely frustrating work which is never as good as you want it to be. You have to keep on trying, but still it's not good enough. It's never good enough. What the reward is for a writer, I don't know.

INT: You said just now, that you're only concerned with telling a story. Still, it is possible to read in philosophical content in your works. There is a unity, a kind of purpose or theme binding your works together, don't you think?

WF (flatly): There isn't any theme in my work, or maybe if there is, you can call it a certain faith in man and his ability to always prevail and endure over circumstances and over his own destiny.

INT: But in many of your books, it seems as if the majority of

your characters are trapped by fate.

WF: But (gesturing with pipe) there is always some one person who survives, who triumphs over his fate.

INT: Still, so many more go down than survive.

WF: That's all right. That they go down doesn't matter. It's *how* they go under.

INT: And what is the way to go under?

WF: It's to go under when trying to do more than you know how to do. It's trying to defy defeat even if it's inevitable.

INT: You say that man will endure and prevail. Would you care to comment on just how he will prevail today in this atomic age?

WF: Why, yes. Man has many more ways to destroy himself physically, but perhaps he has no more ways for destroying himself spiritually than he had hundreds of years ago. Man's environment is the only thing that changes. He must change with it. He will cope with it. The problems he faces today are the same ones he faced when he came out of the mud and first stood on two legs. Man wants to be braver than he is. He wants to have more compassion than he has. Suddenly, sometimes, he finds to his surprise he *is* more brave and more honest. He does stand up and say that this injustice shall no longer prevail, and then he does something so that it shall no longer prevail. Man does things at times that make it seem that he is not worthy of surviving. But he redeems himself at other times. He shall prevail.

(WF holds interviewer with long firm look, then tamps down pipe.)

INT: Tell me, how do you feel yourself toward your own work? Do you have a favorite book, is there one you especially care for?

WF: Well, I judge my books by how much work and agony went into 'em. Something like *As I Lay Dying* was easy, real easy. A *tour de force*. It took me just about six weeks. (With a grin.) I could write a book like that with both hands tied behind my back. It just came all of a piece with no work on my part. Just came like that. I just thought of all the natural catastrophes that could happen to a family and let them all happen. . . . The book which took the most agony was *The Sound and the Fury*. Took me five years of re-working and re-writing. Never did finish it.

INT: How did you come to write *The Sound and the Fury?*

WF: It started out as a short story about two children being sent out to play in the yard during their grandmother's funeral. Only one of the little girls was big enough to climb a tree to look in the

window to see what was going on. It was going to be a story of blood gone bad. The story told wasn't all. The idiot child had started out as a simple prop at first as a bid for extra sympathy. Then I thought what would the story be told like as he saw it. So I had him look at it. When I'd finished I had a quarter of the book written, but it still wasn't all. It still wasn't enough. So then Quentin told the story as he saw it and it still wasn't enough. Then Jason told the story and it still wasn't enough. Then I tried to tell the story and it still was not enough, and so I wrote the appendix and it wasn't enough. It's the book I feel tenderest towards. I couldn't leave it alone, and I never could tell it right, though I tried hard and would like to try again though I'd probably fail again. It's the tragedy of two lost women: Caddy and her daughter.

INT: This is something I've often wondered about. You know that in some of your writing, as in the short story, "That Evening Sun Go Down," you tell it simply, directly, beautifully. But in some of your novels, it's very difficult for the reader to grasp the thread and sometimes even the plot without a second or third reading. Is this intentional or it is maybe the fault of the reader?

WF: No, it's not the reader's fault. I try as every artist should to tell my story simply and clearly. If sometimes I don't succeed it is my fault.

INT: Does the fact that you now have a much greater reading public than you used to influence you in any way when you write?

WF (emphatically): No. . . . I never think about people reading my books when I'm writing them. When I was younger, never gave any thought to folks reading my books at all. Now that I'm—well—somewhat slower (with a little smile) it pleases me to think my books are read, but it still doesn't affect my writing of 'em any.

INT: You say that writing for a larger public doesn't affect you in any way. What about writing for the movies? Does this require any special attitude or adjustment on your part?

WF: Well (slow smile), you know, I don't really take American movies very seriously. I've got a friend who's a director out in Hollywood and we have an agreement. When I need money I call him, and when he wants a script he calls me. But I don't take writing for the movies seriously.

INT: How do you feel about your books being read and discussed all over the world?

WF: I like it. (Little nod of approval.) I like the idea of the world I created being a kind of keystone in the universe. Feel that

if I ever took it away the universe around that keystone would crumble away. . . . If they believed in my world in America the way they do abroad, I could probably run one of my characters for President . . . (studiously tamping his pipe) maybe Lem Snopes. (With a quick look up at the interviewer.)

INT: I see you've got some of us Greniers living in a shack as half-wits down in Yoknapatawpha County.

WF (looking with interest at interviewer): Why sure. Grenier was one of the first three settlers in my county. There was Habersham, Holstan, and the Frenchman Grenier. The last of the Habershams was Miss Habersham—remember her in *Intruder in the Dust?*

(Nod from the interviewer followed by a silence. One of the most agreeable qualities about Faulkner is his capacity for being silent in a natural, easy way.)

INT: I was reading over "The Bear" the other night, and though I don't know much about hunting or anything like that, I liked the feelings in the story. I thought it was a very good story.

(WF: Appraising look, and almost a smile. Waits.)

INT: Tell me, was there a real Big Ben and a Lion?

WF: Yes. There used to be a bear like Big Ben in our county when I was a boy. He'd gotten one paw caught in a trap, and 'cause of that, folks used to call him Reel Foot, 'cause of the way he walked. He got killed too, though not so spectacularly as I killed him in the story of course. . . . (Drawing on pipe reflectively.) I took Hoggan-beck from a fella that worked for my father. He was about thirty, but had the mind of a fourteen-year-old. I was about eight or nine. 'Course, me being the boss's son, we always did what I wanted to do. It's a wonder we survived, some of the things we got into. It's a wonder.

INT: I imagine from what you've said, and from what's known from your writing and life, that you've taken quite a lot from your own experience to put into your books. Like the parts in your books on aviation for instance. Did those come out of your own experience?

WF: No. They came from the imagination and experience of anyone who had much to do with airplanes at that time.

INT: Who are your favorite literary characters in your own work?

WF: Dilsey and Ratliff, the sewing-machine agent.

INT: Why?

WF: Well, Dilsey is brave, courageous, generous, gentle and honest. She's much more brave and honest and generous than I am. . . . Ratliff is wonderful. He's done more things than any man I know.

Why, I couldn't tell some of the things that man has done. . . . (Pause. Sudden and direct.) And who are *your* favorite characters?

INT (startled): Isaac McCaslin in "The Bear."

WF (smiling a little, very quick and direct): Why?

INT: Because he underwent the baptism in the forest, because he rejected his inheritance.

WF: And do you think it's a good thing for a man to reject an inheritance?

INT: Yes, in McCaslin's case. He wanted to reject a tainted inheritance. You don't think it's a good thing for him to have done so?

WF: Well, I think a man ought to do more than just repudiate. He should have been more affirmative instead of shunning people.

INT: Do you think that any of your characters succeed in being more affirmative?

WF: Yes, I do. There was Gavin Stevens. He was a good man but he didn't succeed in living up to his ideal. But his nephew, the boy, I think he may grow up to be a better man than his uncle. I think he may succeed as a human being.

INT: And who is your unfavorite character?

WF: Jason. Jason Compton.

INT: I noticed that a few months ago you were quoted as having listed five American authors in order of their excellence—Wolfe, yourself, Dos Passos, Caldwell, and Hemingway—was that correct?

WF: No. It was not. I was misquoted. I listed those writers according to what they had tried to do and to what measure they had succeeded in their attempt. I put Tom Wolfe first because he tried to do the most. He tried to put the whole universe into his books and failed. His was the most glorious failure. And then myself. I tried the most after Wolfe and failed the most after him. Then Dos Passos, Caldwell and Hemingway in order of what they aimed at. Hemingway was taught to know his limitations, and he had enough sense to stay within them, instead of trying to put all the world on the head of a pin.

INT: How do you feel your books would have to be in order for you to feel you had to some measure succeeded?

WF: I'd have to feel the way I do when I read the *Tentation de Saint Antoine,* or the plays of Marlowe, or the Old Testament. (Looking down at his pipe.) A fiction writer is a failed poet, a factual recorder of the past. A writer believes in man and life and tries to record the triumph of the human heart, as best and as honestly as he can.

INT: How do you feel towards your latest work?

WF: It's a *tour de force.*

INT: I thought you spent many years writing it.

WF: That's right, but it's still a *tour de force.* I knew exactly what I wanted to do, but it took me nine years to find how to do it. But I knew what I wanted to do.

(Chestnut falls from tree, bouncing near Faulkner.)

WF: You have to watch out for those things. I was sitting in the park across the way yesterday, reading my newspaper and one of those things came right down—bang—through the paper. Just like that.

INT: I hear you went to a fashion show yesterday. What did you think of it?

WF (grinning reminiscently): I liked it fine. Seemed all sort of foolish. All those women sitting around watching those tall cold girls walking around in fancy clothes. There was one woman there who must have weighed at least 180 pounds. How she thought she was going to get into any of those dresses, I don't know. I'll bet you could remove all those people who were there yesterday from the face of the earth, and nobody'd say anything. Or maybe somebody one day would say, "I wonder what happened to Madame Jones, we haven't seen her lately." You know, there's some lines of verse. Let's see. How'd it go now? I haven't thought of it in years. "Women in their silks and fineries . . ." No, that's not it. Mmm. . . . (Shakes head.)

(INT waits while Faulkner thinks, samples out lines of verse and rejects them.)

INT: Look, I hope I'm not keeping you here. Maybe you have an appointment.

WF: Well, as a matter of fact, I do, over on the Left Bank. If I left now I could walk over. I like walking in Paris. It's always a beautiful city. Especially the rooftops. I like looking out my hotel window across the rooftops of Paris.

(WF sits, pulls on his tan tweed jacket with its dark leather patches on the elbows, stretches a little. Stands looking about.)

WF: Looks like only the Government can afford to have places like this today.

(INT and WF start walking through garden out into parking lot.)

INT: Do you have any special advice for young writers?

WF: Yes, I do. The most important thing is for them to write. They shouldn't ought to care about the public. They should just get the words out of themselves and down onto paper. What matters is at the end of life, when you're about to pass into oblivion, that you've

at least scratched "Kilroy was here," on the last wall of the universe. Nothing else matters. Don't pay attention to success. She's, like I told you, feminine. Don't chase her. Like a woman, she'll come fawning after. What counts is that you've done *something*.

(WF looks up at the sky, takes a deep breath.)

WF: The French don't have any word for Indian summer, do they? They should.

EMMA SWAN:

The Visit

What is it, as you say, what then,
Dear sir, to you,
If I have found a lion's den
And wander through?

I look around and wonder that
I have not seen
A lion's den before nor sat
Where I could mean

The pleasing of an appetite
And nothing more.
I try to keep my smiling bright
And seek the door.

Oh how may I, proposed for feasts,
Escape from here,
Or would it stop the king of beasts
To say, "My dear!"

These questions will not last for long,
The den is small.
Which one of us should prove most strong
Will settle all.

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT:

A Day Off

Profiles of mountains slice the clean sky.
At the window when I take a deep breath
Bubbles no bigger than pinheads explode
Up and bright in my nose. The children jump;
They bruise their shouts against four-story walls;
They lob dry clods from behind the garage
Onto the concrete driveway crumblingly.

Dear, wash some celery, butter some bread,
Broil a couple of chickens, and put in the salt;
And I'll go get some olives and sharp cheese,
Wine, paper napkins, pop for the kids, grapes,
And pack a camp-chair in the car for Jo
If she'll come; and we'll Spring-trespass again
On the Water District's fenced, pleasant fields.

Phyllis's voice, keen and up in her head,
Traces its melodies with a fine edge;
Barney, when he plays his sweet recorder,
Whets back and forth, his shirt off, his brown hair
Tangled as a goat's, prancing as he flutes.
We'll phone them; they'll want to go to the beach,
Find tidepools, loll around a driftwood fire—

But sky for the day is lightened of lead,
Sun's hot: we'll drive them out the Bear Creek Road
And jounce through gullies in a farmer's ruts
To a cluster of unpruned cherry trees,
A green picnic by an abandoned shed.
We'll gulp the bubbling air, we'll watch the kids
Leap through the meadow grass chasing the cows,

Jo will mount butterflies on her sharp words,
Phyllis will wend through tunes, Barney will skip,
We'll all get high. Maybe this afternoon,
As on the day we first happened upon
That mottling shade at the foot of a hill,
Petals of blossoms shaken by a gust
Will scatter over us, light in your hair.

Hubris

Pompey in triumph through the streets of Rome
Stood in his chariot upright in the god's robe,
But under the trumpet of the people's pride
The voice of a slave holding the golden crown
Gnawed at the back of his head:
You are a mortal man.

Henry at Canossa, that vast fortress,
Master of kingdoms, will of a forest of swords,
Was forced in his castle yard, alone,
Ashy, denuded of the blazons of his armed will,
To crawl on his knees to a pope
Who had walked through his stone walls.

I behind curtains in my voting booth,
My rubber stamp inked black and poised to choose,
Form, as I'm told, the ultimate will;
So, in my brown suit, with unbended knees,
Ungnawed, being unwalled,
Wildly I wield my X's.

S. P. ZITNER:

Thrift Shop

Hats for pinheads, goldilocks and cretins:
Sallow fedoras thirsty for Allnight Joe's,
Avuncular bowlers, top hats that have presided
At some queer breakfasts, a morose beret,
Turbans for a Gordian face, cloches that struck
The time of love, a sailor with spinster ribbons
Just ironed, a feather toque now extinct.

Maybe Oscar or Darlene could wear them.

For the cheerfully practical nether end, shoes:
Brogue, pump, tennis, bunion-cheeked
In hale old age, shining young misfits,
English matron hoofs with fringed tongues
And respectable falsetto, to-hounds and ballet,
A gimpy boot and four horse-, welded like clover
For grocery grand openings in a cold beer neighborhood.

And everything for what's in-between, hanging
On pipe racks in two-dimensional collapse,
With the desolate human soil still in it as though
The whole congregation Homo Faber, standing
Single file, had just now jumped and flown
Joyously dream-naked through the ceiling.
Yes, everything that cries: don't touch me, January,
I'm no beast; or cries: through this, despite this,
Know me, want me, value me, other man or woman.

It is all humanized by error, wholesomely discounted
By at least 60% when it is first made public
And about 10% more as each month passes.
You ought to rejoice in this oracular junk; it proves
That most mistakes people make are not important.

KAE GUHL:

The Opponent

In addition to a nameless cat and a sepia photograph of Effie—taken by Metropolitan Studios twenty years ago, so that it, and his last memory of her, refused to jibe—William Keble had a queer passion for checkers which he couldn't indulge, living alone as he did. Queer, because William Keble hadn't played checkers more than four or five times in his life, the weeks following the Christmas he had received the board from his housekeeper's daughter, who had since grown up and left home. Lately, though, something had forced him, against his will, to take down the box of checkers from the shelf in the secretary and finger them one by one, usually during late evening when his normally sharp vision was dulled by the poor parlor light and his fingers seemed to possess a peculiar acuteness of touch. One time (though he hated to remember it) he had gone so far as to set up the game on the gateleg table, sit down to it, and stare hard across the board at the pocket of emptiness which failed to materialize into a flesh-and-blood partner. Afterwards he was so ashamed of this childish act that it was two weeks before he would even let his eyes drift in the general direction of the secretary—two weeks during which the letter came from his grandson Matt and he temporarily forgot about checkers.

He read the letter through only once, then reached for the phone and spoke with Matt long distance, hiring him on the spot to come and be his chauffeur. Later, of course, he found himself laying out a sizeable chunk of cash for the hand-operated car. But he couldn't afford to regret the expenditure, for without the car he couldn't have hired Matt and without Matt there would have been no checker games. As for Matt's trouble, Keble adopted a philosophical attitude. So what if he preferred not to watch as Matt undressed at night? Matt wasn't the first veteran to have lost a pair of legs, and the way things were going he wasn't likely to be the last. And as an extra bonus, given as though in reward for his magnanimity, Keble found that he liked Matt—though he liked him even more once the checker games assumed a comfortable habit.

After the first few games Keble left the box and checker board permanently on the gateleg table where his housekeeper, who came

in only once a week, fussed and fumed about it, threatening to put it back in the secretary where it belonged. "Don't even dust it," Keble ordered. "Just leave it be. Haven't you got enough to dust without carrying on over a checker board?" At which she sniffed and remarked, yes, indeed, there was enough junk around to keep five women busy seven days a week, but Keble shushed her with a determined look and she scuttled for the kitchen.

She had just left, one winter night, assuring Keble that he and his grandson would surely die of indigestion from his cooking if they didn't die from clutter first. Keble shook the spatula after her, scattering particles of grease from the eggs he was frying. "Busybody!" he shouted. "If you didn't need the money I wouldn't put up with you!" But the back door banged the only answer and he turned to Matt with a wicked "Hee hee!"

They ate quickly, Keble's face already set in anticipation of the game to come. After they had finished, Keble stacked the dirty dishes, poked at the coals in the range and set the coffee pot on top to warm. Then he went into the parlor followed by Matt, who wheeled himself up to the gateleg table and lit his after-dinner cigarette. Keble sat down, scraping his chair busily until he was situated properly before the board.

Beyond the ecru-curtained windows snow spilled down, lingering only long enough to melt. Indoors, the cat, a large Maltese female, filled the shadows with her purr, a subtle sound that was light with movement like the snow. All winter Keble had suffered from a racking cough that jarred his body and left his thin dry lips flecked with saliva. Now as he coughed over the board the cat lifted her head, then got up languidly and padded to a distant corner, exploring some unheard sound. Satisfied, she approached the gateleg table and delicately curled around Matt's chair until he bent to lift her, holding her for a moment against his chest.

"Put her down," Keble said, looking up from the board with a frown.

Matt blinked his dull brown eyes and lowered the cat to his lap. "I like to hold her."

Keble coughed for a moment. "Either we play checkers or you pet the cat."

"She feels good," Matt said heavily. "I wish something human could feel half as soft."

Keble snorted and wiped his nose with the back of his hand.

"You'll never find it. Women look soft but there's a lot of bone underneath."

Matt idly stacked his checkers with his left hand. "Grandma always looked kind of soft," he said.

Keble sighed, his eyes dulling with the recollection of her death. Then abruptly he began to cough again.

"Your move," Matt said when he had finished.

Fixing his rimless glasses firmly on the bridge of his nose, Keble bent over the board. "Let's see now," he murmured to himself. "Should I move this one?"

"You moved that one first last night."

"I did?" He looked up, his eyes narrowing. "How come you're so sure?"

"I just remember, that's all. Look—couldn't we play something else for a change? Poker, maybe? Or just talk?"

A black checker dropped from Keble's limp hand and careened a moment on the table. He looked up and his mud-colored eyes were filled with shock. "Something else?" he rasped. "Something else?"

"Well, I only suggested it. I only thought it might be fun to once in a while play something different. Or just talk."

Keble raised his vein-clotted hand and slapped it down hard on the board. "I like checkers, damn you! Now play!"

But the vehement hand had scattered the checkers. At the sound the cat shot from Matt's lap while he sat tense and surprised, watching Keble fumble over the board, patting the checkers clumsily as though trying to coax them back into place again. But they were hopelessly jumbled, red mixed with black, and his bony shoulders sagged. Why didn't Keble ever answer him directly, Matt thought. It was only a game, something to pass the time while Keble grew older and Matt tried to pretend there were two legs where the sensations of legs were, pretend that the itch he bent to scratch was an itch of the flesh, not the itch of mind.

So they would play again, Matt thought wearily, watching Keble sort the checkers. He felt he ought to hate Keble for taking him in, and so pointedly ignoring the missing legs. It was Matt's duty, if age represented duty, to care for Keble, rather than the other way around. But he would play checkers again if Keble wanted him to, for, actually, there was nothing else to do. Playing checkers helped Matt forget, gave him an excuse to hold and warm himself at the cat. He was especially cold at night beneath the pile of blankets that never

seemed quite enough. Keble insisted the cat stay in the closed-off kitchen. "Cats don't belong in sleeping rooms," he said. Matt didn't argue. It was Keble's house, Keble's bed he slept in. But he would lie at night in the same room with Keble, listening to his old man's wheeze and frequent coughs, and feel an actual physical longing for the cat. The sound of her purr had become tactile to him and he could not separate the sensations of sight and touch in his mind. Perhaps it was falling asleep without that feline warmth he wanted so badly that made him dream. This was what he tried to believe. He could no longer tell himself, "It's only a dream," or, "My subconscious is remembering." At night the strata of his mind became unified. And after a few hours of restless rolling sleep he would wake again with prickling hands, his breath whishing dry through tight lips, eyes straining outward to look at Keble who had heard the horrified dream-cry that always woke them both. But Keble, safe in the dimness of a streetlight's wandering ray, would toss on his creaking bed and pull the pillow over his head, rejecting whatever it was that stretched quivering between them. In the morning Keble would look at Matt and they would both remember, Matt the texture of his dream and Keble his rejection of it. Keble would flush and pull at his nose. Then, just as it seemed they had to talk about it, to break that weighted silence, Keble would begin to talk about the house or their last game of checkers, his voice falsely bright and hearty.

Matt braced his hands on his chair and shifted position. Keble got up and shuffled into the kitchen, returning with two mugs of coffee while Matt arranged the board. They never did the same things at the same time; they never touched each other. It was as though physical contact would destroy some arbitrary balance between them. Keble set Matt's mug near his elbow, then sank down, coughing gently. He settled himself, then blew his nose with all the conscious bluster of a man who knows he is foul secreting flesh and doesn't care.

"How's the cough?" Matt asked.

"Better, better," Keble answered. "How you feeling, boy?"

Matt flushed at the "boy." It was the closest Keble ever came to obvious affection. "Swell," he said and picked up his mug, slurping noisily to hide his confusion.

"Ready?" Keble asked, patting his knees with his hands.

"Sure. You want to move first this time?"

Keble glared at him, his jaw set. It was a big heavily muscled jaw; it seemed to swell and support the sagging flesh of the cheeks, stretching it free of wrinkles. "What's the matter with you?" Keble asked. "You know you move first."

Matt sighed and moved, his mind already dull and unreflective.

Keble nodded, then stretching out his index finger touched a checker and looked slyly at Matt. He studied Matt's face as though it would tell him how to move. Then he looked down and gave the checker a jerky push.

Matt saw his opening but decided not to take it, ignoring the defenseless black checkers ripe for pouncing and moving a distant harmless red circle. As soon as he had moved he felt Keble's anger and looked up. Keble seemed to be holding his breath. Quickly Matt replaced the checker and moved the one menacing Keble's, jumping the black checkers half-heartedly and scooping them up in his hand. He could hear Keble let out his breath in satisfaction and smack his lips.

"See the paper tonight?" Keble asked, as though commenting on Matt's move.

"The paper?" Matt saw it lying on the table and shook his head.

"Go on, look at it," Keble ordered. "Pick it up and look at it—right there on the front page." Impatiently he picked it up himself and folding it vigorously held it over the table, his bony finger indicating the picture.

"Killed in hold-up," Matt read slowly.

"I knew him," Keble said in obvious satisfaction. "The guy got away—the one that did it. Clobbered the old guy with a hunk of pipe he'd found in the back room of the jewelry store." He paused, seemed to weigh something. "What would you do," he asked at last, his voice sepulchral, "if he was to sneak in this house right now and kill us?"

"But the house is locked," Matt said with confused logic.

Keble shook the paper irritably. "No—what would you—tell me!"

Matt wanted to say it out loud, wanted to say: So what if he did? —fat chance I'd have with all my strength in my shoulders. Instead he asked, interested now, "What would *you* do?"

"Do?" Keble repeated, as though only now considering. "Why I reckon I'd just let him kill me and be done with it."

"Do you want to die?" Matt asked in amazement.

Keble coughed violently and drew back. "It wouldn't be death," he said hoarsely, his voice almost a whisper. "It would be murder."

"But—" Matt began and broke off, beginning to understand something about Keble.

Once Matt had seen a boy die who would not believe he was dying. Though the wound had spilled blood like water the boy had not even seen it, calling the pain a stomach ache, telling everyone who wanted

to help that the food was lousy and why the hell didn't somebody do something instead of letting everyone get a goddamn stomach ache. "I'm havin' a cramp!" he had shouted toward the end, and clutching his throat as though he would vomit the pain away he closed his eyes and fell unconscious. Matt felt sick. He had wanted to tighten his hand hard over the boy's still living arm, tell him through the pressure that he was cheating himself, that his life was passing with as little intelligent awareness as though it were only a minor phenomenon instead of the Great one.

What a joke on me, he thought—I really believed that crap. But there was no choice, not really. Not when there was no life, when real life was like a photograph album, a finished collection of fixed and static memories.

"Your move," Matt said at last, rousing himself.

Keble started and looked down at the board as though surprised to see it there. Checkers seemed to be the last thing on his mind—he had the glazed heavy eyes of a man who has thought long and hard on a particular subject and is suddenly interrupted. Finally he reached down and tentatively touched the board as though reassuring himself it was still there. He seemed tired, his hand was clumsy with its own weight when at last he lifted it, held it poised above the board as though unaware he had even moved it. Matt watched him, wanting to speak, to recall him, but afraid of this silent unexplained mood. Then at last Keble extended that weighted hand toward Matt and for a brief moment Matt wondered wildly what he should do. Then he thought: he wants me to shake hands with him! And without considering how ridiculous this was, he began tentatively advancing his own hand toward Keble's. Keble, impassive, watched it come, then, as their hands were about to touch, jerked back his own hand and began studying the board as though nothing had happened.

Matt felt foolish, then irritated with himself and with Keble. His hand felt awkward and stiff on his knee and he cleared his throat self-consciously. Keble was sitting perfectly still, his head bent a little, those thick jaws clamped tight together, the muscles straining out in a ridge on either side of his face. He did not blink or stir. His breath moved the front of his cotton shirt with a kind of terrible steadiness as though not only his breathing, his heart, but his whole body was timing something, waiting for something.

"Your move," Matt said timidly, his voice so low it was engulfed in the sudden meow of the cat as it came into the room. Then Keble began to lean forward, to lean until it was no longer a gentle con-

trolled slant but a slump that seemed of lifeless flesh, seemed doomed to end face down in the middle of the unfinished game.

Because there was nothing else to do and because he could not have stopped himself if he wanted to, Matt put out both hands and caught Keble by the shoulders, feeling the full weight of that silent unexpected slump pushing against his palms. The cat began twining herself around his chair, meowing plaintively.

"Scat! Get away!" Matt hissed through his teeth, and stamped the memory of his foot so that it seemed as though he heard the actual sound of it.

"Keble?" he asked, using the name he had always used with his grandfather. "Are you all right?"

Without opening his eyes Keble began to cough. He coughed steadily for several moments, each cough a distinct jar against Matt's supporting hands. It's just the cough, Matt thought, and let his fingers soften on Keble's shoulders. A strange sensation began to flow through Matt's fingers, a sensation that at first made him want to jerk away. Yet there was a kind of inevitable recognition in the contact that was too relieving to lose. It seemed, in this the first time he had ever touched Keble, that he knew him, knew not only the feel of those brittle bones beneath his fingers, nor just the shape of his face or the sound of his voice, but knew all of him, each worn organ and slow-splitting cell, each thickening vein, even the cough that racked and sapped and each time drained away a fraction more of that diminishing strength. It was as though Keble's life could now be indicated by a segment, like a line drawn, which, instead of extending to infinity, was suddenly exposed to him with both ends apparent. He thought: Keble has to die, he's wearing out in a natural process that has nothing to do with mechanized annihilation. Then he wanted to drop his hands, they pulsed and quivered with Keble's body.

Slowly Keble opened his eyes, looked first at Matt, then down at the hands still supporting his shoulders. He jerked in a small abortive spasm and Matt could feel him shudder. His body was still limp, still pressing hard against Matt's bracing palms. Then, little by little, as though controlled by some interior gauge, the full weight of Keble's shoulders eased away until, so slowly had it happened, Matt was bracing open palms against unresistant air. But before he could draw in his weightless arms Keble reached up and touched Matt's wrists. He searched Matt's wrists and arms and shoulders with the probing fingers of a blind man, his lips moving soundlessly. Matt held his breath, then began breathing rapidly, feeling his hands grow numb as they

did at night during his dreams. Keble's face was blank as though all impressions were received and wholly absorbed by those busy fingertips.

Keble pulled his hands away and got up. The cat lay on the floor near his feet. Without warning he pushed, almost kicked, the cat with his foot as though she, the living, no longer mattered. The cat cried out, more from surprise than pain, and streaked to the kitchen. Keble circled the table and knelt beside Matt's chair, knelt with those seeing hands again outstretched. Curiously he touched Matt's ankle, then, almost shyly, pulled up the trouser leg a few inches to look at the artificial limb. His face had the expression of a child examining a doll, intent, curious, meditative. His mouth too was like a child's, vulnerable, devoid of the tightness of criticism.

Matt watched him. A terrible roaring horror filled him; he could neither move nor speak. Now that contact had been established Keble could not get enough. Matt felt as though each curious touch of Keble's fingers (seen, not felt) was destroying him, reducing him to something he had always been since he lost the legs, but something he had been strong enough to control. Now, faced with himself, stripped of all ability to rationalize, he felt he must submit utterly to Keble as a cornered animal at last recognizes the superiority of the hunter and without a sound awaits whatever must happen.

"Does it hurt?" Keble asked at last.

Matt shook his head.

"Where do they fasten on?"

Matt indicated a spot well above his knees.

Satisfied, Keble got up. He stared vaguely around the room for a moment, then collected the coffee mugs and returned them to the kitchen. Matt tried to help by clearing the checkerboard but his fingers were clumsy, he spilled the checkers on the floor as he tried to fit them into the box. When Keble came back he glanced at the fallen checkers but said nothing. Matt wanted to shout at him, he wanted Keble to return him to what he had been before, to give him the decency of a tongue and the ability to dissemble his false legs into something he himself had almost believed in. But Keble was hard now and cold.

When they went into the bedroom Keble forgot to close the kitchen doors. Matt wanted to remind him, then, remembering the way Keble had kicked the cat aside, decided not to. Keble undressed, then stood in his nightshirt before the picture of Effie on the bureau. He seemed to lean slightly toward it. Matt sat still in his chair and watched him, his hands on the artificial limbs beside him on the floor. Finally Keble

picked up the photograph, holding it close to his face for a moment. Matt looked away, braced himself on the arms of his chair and prepared to lift himself onto the bed.

Keble turned, the photograph still in his hand. "You get the car out tomorrow," he ordered. "I want to take a little trip."

Matt cleared his throat. "Sure."

"I'm going to pick me out a tombstone," Keble said. "Going to get one like Effie's. The only way to get a thing done right is to see to it yourself. You hear me?"

"Sure. I hear you."

Keble stared at him. His mud-colored eyes seemed to say: Poor boy, it's too soon for you, isn't it?

Matt clenched his hands. Keble put down the photograph and got into bed. He coughed several times, then sat up, watching curiously while Matt lifted himself onto the bed. Matt closed his eyes to shut out that stare, and with his eyes still closed, sweating and breathing hard, he heard Keble get up to turn off the light. Then he opened his eyes and lay watching the ray of light from the window. It had stopped snowing and through the stillness he heard the clock ticking on the bureau. Somewhere in the house the cat roamed free. Matt lay listening to Keble's slow wheeze, wondering if he slept, thinking: yes, he could sleep now, now that he knows the sight of death, the feel of it. But what about me? he thought, and heard the question go meaninglessly through his mind.

After a while the stillness seeped into his mind. Slowly his exhausted body relaxed and he slept, holding himself on the near edge of consciousness.

Two hours later he opened his eyes. He had not dreamed. The shock of it held him suspended, his eyes dilated and sightless in the darkened room. It seemed that if he were to voice his dream-cry now it would turn inward, exploring, not the room and Keble as before, but the inner silent room where his awareness had been muffled like the clapper of a bell that moved mutely when the rope was tugged. Now it was no longer mute, now he seemed to hear the strong echoing call of it, pure and hard as a diamond, not the call of doom, but of life, everywhere around him, pulsing and vibrating with that clarion ding dong like the first yellow shaft of morning.

He flung out both arms and gripped the edges of his bed, holding them in a deep and dazzling drunkenness as his body seemed to be borne up and up, the blood pulsing in his ears until they too began to ring.

And then he heard something, some soft secretive sound that collapsed his fragile vision in vibrating tatters around him. He blinked. It had begun to snow again and the flakes floated down, shadowing the beam of light that lay across Keble's bed. The sound was gone, the room empty, yet alive with the shreds of his vision. Then suddenly the cat meowed near him and leaped, in a startling forward arc, onto his bed, exploring the hillocks of the blankets and nestling finally along his side.

For a moment Matt lay rigid, still gripping the bed.

Then he opened his hand; opened and closed the fingers as though testing the weight and resilience of air. Slowly, deliberately, he brought his hand in, held it above the body of the cat. Slowly, triumphantly, he lowered it, laid it over the source of the living sound, feeling her purr begin, first soft, then stronger, throbbing into his hand, his body, his life.

MAGGIE RENNERT:

Loss of the Navigator Near Kansas City

He was reading the stars when the bubble broke.
The end of a factory worker's night on the town?
Or the devil in a rivet?—Anyway, like smoke
he was drafted upward on the sucking air,
stunned, spiralled, then became his weight, and down,

a lifetime downward tumbled in silence where
four engines had fled and left him alone.
If, when the night plucked him, despair
leadened him, or all his sins upon his head
were grave—he fell no faster, that much we've known

since Pisa. A man of faith in Plexiglas is dead
of a moment's constellation. A disciple of limit,
mistaken, he rose from error when the infinite
included him. His death was never unexpected.

SISTER M. MAURA:

Tourist in Dante

1

He took the strata dome for comfort and
flood light at night: Hell gate he saw and fire
outdid the myth of Hades, and he punned
the script—leave hope behind—for any bar.
The picture cards he bought he chose to gull
the rocker on the porch at home: the jaws
of Ugolino at the bishop's skull;
the Malebolge in flat color views;
another of the tidy giants' wall;
a mimic Hogarth of the hairy legs
of Lucifer; an abstract of the roll
and pitch of slothful clogged in mud like frogs.
And for himself a studio print he chose:
Democritus and Zeno called the wise.

2

He wearied of the terraces almost
immediately; disliked the hymnal rite,
the spiral tremor in the mountain crust
(no seismographic indication that
it could occur). The outworn shibboleth
of seven-three, the graven mountain side
he read, even the sculptored stone beneath
his feet, with clinical exactitude.
The too-bright travelling day revealed the catch,
the crowds, the tavern-like democracy.
A momentary thought of Malevich
or Klee perhaps soothed him as he saw
processional of candles, but light showed
the gryphon glorious. He caught the fraud.

3

He dreaded most the gasp, the broken rune
of breath on breath. He clipped the traveller's mask
to mouth and nose but knew the oxygen
might fail. There was no one to ask. Star-discs
betrayed his sight. He thought he glimpsed a group
but it was all mercurial sound and light
honeycombing airy touchless slopes.
Somehow he was beyond the hurtling jet
of supersonic speed; he fought the rant
of choric peace, the native eloquent
propulsion toward an eye-unclouded point.
He could not wait to hail a taxi, flint
his lighter, suck a cigarette, get out
and to his room and drink a whiskey straight.

NAT HERZ:

Concerning a Ritual Performed by a Small Animal

All light loves a clear cool lying.
The sparks from a green cock's eye
Force wisdom through a tree, while the wind
Weaves merrily our night past all the dancing moons,
Along the stars and into a perfect whatever.

Carry the calf's wound calmly
With hands pressed sweet
To the jagged flesh: our inevitable milk,
White and at the warm throat clinging
Requires the wisdom of this kindness.

The Real Is the Mysterious

The white sky discovered
A black child whirling in the garden,
And this beneath green, fallen leaves:
Teeth lost in moss,
And an arm in the sand beside the lake.

Weeds withered and words were withheld that day,
For this. It was the word within the tree,
The cause of crocodiles, bananas, and goats:
Without this was a feather without a breeze.

Lips were lost in the softness of melons:
Without burning bushes
Were toes hard against clouds,
And fishes in kelp entangled:
With or without visions
Were oranges cold in the trees.

This was the day that silver turned green
And Moses laughed in the garden.

JASCHA KESSLER:

Philosophical Transactions at Montauk

1

The follies of the Sanhedrin prepared
us for innocence, a high August sun,
shore of broken conches emptied of flesh
by local synods of gulls, this tumult
of waters patched now blue, now gray, now black,
swashing about surf fishers' knees. Like posts

they stand, casting, reeling, casting, reeling,
roughdressed, rawhanded, stubblefaced, staring
at the blank stretch of sea, while behind them
flies quarrel over scraps of stinking bait.

2

Even God deserts his echoes. Silence
confounds the drone of antique deliberations
whose heavens were harsher than life. Dismissed,
our elders trudged to their tabernacles
in the moral fires, and left us this world.
Is it strange to be content to be hopeless?
Consider burrowing nations of clams,
or fat porgies scrounging those taut fish lines.
Having no questions we need no answers,
lush marrow is neither bilge nor ichor.

3

We must grant concessions to animus,
one glance shows the bland fury of this Point:
rocks plunging awash, a tide-bitten beach,
the necessary lighthouse at the end,
monstrous squalls and human desolation.
So we're paupers staring east at zero;
yet grant this simple hour better than most:
we sit at the good and the true, smoking,
talking our jargon. Out of the welter
we plucked breath, and a pail full of beach plums.

DONALD FINKEL:

Poem

We have been around,
Have stood, watching
The heathen Turk heel
And run, and laughing.

We have run, ourselves,
Have seen what we perhaps
Should not have seen:
Banquo standing dismally

By the chair; the little
Prince in the ingle-nook,
And Boris howling like
A hurt lion. To look

At us, you wouldn't think
We'd much to atone for:
A little honest sensuality,
A few bald-faced lies. More

Than once we fought on
The right side, allowing
There was one. How much
Time can you spend, looking

For a cause? Better to win
Wrongly than not at all.
Should there be nothing tragic,
There's always greed to fall

Back upon. Better to fight
Now, and pay for it later,
When the silence is more bearable,
And the ghost capers in the corner.

BREWSTER GHISELIN:

The Unity of Joyce's 'Dubliners'

II

Both the purpose and the length of this paper preclude discussion of all the symbolism of *Dubliners.* Enough of it has been defined in the preceding exposition, however, to make possible a brief and sufficiently clear account of the stories in sequence, as a means of displaying the outlines of the unifying action of the book in its essential character. To avoid reiteration, I will refrain from pointing out the import of the symbolism at every turn. The reader will no doubt find it preferable to bear in mind the meaning of the chief symbolic images and their main function in the symbolic pattern and to be constantly active in discernment. I will, however, make whatever interpretations may be required by the purpose of the discussion, to reveal the single action of *Dubliners* in the separate actions of the principal figures, story by story to trace in their diverse histories the symbolically significant motions and arrests and to discover in them the one composite movement of the agonistic soul of the Irish through stage after stage of its decline.

In the first story of *Dubliners,* "The Sisters," the sterility of Irish life is defined. As a naturalistic narrative, it is an account of a boy's deprivation of spiritual guidance and support, through the death of his friend the priest Father Flynn, a paralytic who has committed the ecclesiastical crime of simony, a sin implying worldliness, and has broken a chalice. His spiritual impotence even in life is made apparent by symbolic means. Sitting in a stupor, enclosed in his little dark room in his sisters' house that is also a shop, he spills through trembling fingers a powder of snuff. As odorous "clouds of smoke" it resembles incense, descending rather than rising. As "clouds" being "dribbled" in "showers," it has the aspect also of a liquid. Dropping from the hands that have broken a chalice, it is a dusty successor to the sacramental wine. Brown, like the earth of Ireland, it tinges his black garments with green.

When the priest is dead, his sisters Nannie and Eliza assume his place and functions in a significant scene. Nannie's name and the

appearance of her shoes "trodden down all to one side" suggest a goat, or worse. In the strangeness of her feet and in the clumsy way "her skirt was hooked at the back" she resembles the celebrant of the black mass in the Circe episode of *Ulysses,* who has "two left feet back to the front" and wears "a long petticoat and reversed chasuble." When the boy and his aunt visit the home of the dead priest and she performs the hospitable actions paralleling imperfectly the ceremony of the Eucharist, her evil aspect is a means of emphasizing the invalid character of the sacramental action. Essentially, however, she is a feckless old woman who does wrong in ignorance. Eliza, just as innocently usurping the position of the dead priest, is "seated in his armchair in state." She tells Nannie to pour the wine, and when she sits silent the others wait respectfully for her to speak. Her position, given force by her authority, suggests that of a bishop or pope, whose chair or throne can symbolize his state.

The futility of the spurious ritual is emphasized by two references to the empty fireplace, dark since the death of the priest. The symbolic import of the image is confirmed and defined by a parallel in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man:* the dean of studies, seen kindling a fire, "seemed . . . a humble server making ready the place of sacrifice in an empty temple." The boy, moreover, refuses the ministration of the women. He rejects the crackers, the bread, the one element administered to the laity in communion, and takes up the wine from the table himself, the element reserved for the priest, as if he were sensible of the "great wish" that the priest has had for him, or as if he were conscious of the implications of his recent dream in which the priest has attempted to confess to him as to a priest. The suggestions in this dream of the assumption of spiritual responsibility by the boy and of his journeying to a churchlike place in the East, where there are "long curtains and a swinging lamp of antique fashion," define the need of Dubliners to seek out for themselves the spiritual life that is no longer available in Ireland.

In this story, however, the need for reorientation of the soul is no further defined than in these intimations. At the end, the boy and his companions are reminded of the priest in life, "in the dark of his confession-box" alone and laughing in his mild dementia, and they listen briefly for some similar token of life remaining in the coffin. Hearing no sound, the boy understands with apparent finality that the paralysis of Father Flynn is complete in death. Perhaps the death of God is intimated, for the priest lies overhead, and, moreover, in a stroke of wit Joyce has given him in the very first sentence of the book

an aspect of God, in stating that hope for his life was abandoned at the third onset of his malady, as if his death must be threefold. The surmise is made more plausible by the fact that, like that "half-witted God of the Roman Catholics" scorned by the Stephen of *Stephen Hero,* the priest has not been for some time wholly himself. Whatever we may wish to make of this, the fact remains that the boy, an orphan, is bereaved of his fatherly friend and is left without other spiritual authority to guide him than his own powers. Though these have been vaguely suggested in his dream he has no reason to have faith in them.

In the first story of *Dubliners* the action takes place in or near the priest's home in Great Britain Street, near the center of Dublin, and though the boy dreams of a far country he does not conceive of going there or understand that he can move beyond the limits of his circumstances. The symbolic orient does not draw him. This is a story of the soul suspended in almost complete arrest, only vaguely sensing its orient and its powers.

In the second story, "An Encounter," a boy who lives in the northeast part of the city moves southeastward, across the Liffey, to wander in Ringsend. The expedition is a disorderly adventure of truants from a Catholic school, who "break out of the weariness of school-life for one day." Inspired by stories of the Wild West, they have spent their evenings in disorderly play that has seemed liberating but at last has become wearisome. The narrator begins to desire real adventures, but he understands that "they must be sought abroad." With another boy he plans to go along the Wharf Road until they reach the shipping by the quays, to cross in the ferry, and to visit the Pigeon House, a fort at the mouth of the Liffey, a mile east of Ringsend. The name of their eastward goal is symbolic, since the pigeon, or rock dove, is an emblem of the Holy Ghost. Accomplishing all but the last part of their plan, they admire a Norwegian vessel, observe the sea-colored eyes of the sailors, and remain in Ringsend to eat musty biscuits and chocolate and to drink pink lemonade and to idle away their afternoon. Their hope of escape does not carry them so far eastward as they desire, but it brings them into contact with a pervert, green-eyed and dressed in "greenish-black," the hellish image of that spirit of disorder which has moved them. The implication is that in Ireland the choice for those who would have "real adventures" lies between degradation and conventional order. In this story, though the unsatisfied soul moves a little way eastward, in the hope of escape into life, it is quickly frustrated.

In "Araby," the third story, as in the first, the absence of spiritual sustenance in Dublin is symbolized by the death of a priest. The enclosure of musty air in the house where he has died is suggestive of staleness in the very breath of life which he has ceased to animate, and the fact that he has been a "very charitable priest" is a reminder of that Christian virtue of love which in this story is portrayed as flourishing briefly before its dispersal. Outside, however, the evening sky has the liturgical color of violet and the air has a vital sting, the lamps of Dublin glow, there is music of shaken harness, and Mangan's sister stands on the doorstep. Her dress swings, the "rope of her hair" is "tossed." In this imagery there is vital motion and a slight suggestion of the sea, symbol of the soul's orient. If the Church lacks spiritual life, the natural life of man may be elevated to take its place. By his idealizing love, the boy narrator may restore the spiritual life of the secular city, worshipping his madonna in eucharistic rituals as if he would assume the powers of priest in a new faith. Leaving his home in the northeast part of Dublin, he journeys in an empty train across the water of the Liffey to a far place of eastern appearance and name, the bazaar *Araby,* where he hopes to obtain a gift for her, some confirmation of the life that exalts him. Hope, faith, and love itself are destroyed when, at his goal, he finds the bazaar about to close, silent like "a church after a service," and at its center the vulgar attendants conversing and counting money. The soul's energy has carried it across water but not to the sea, far eastward but to a secular goal, not to its true orient.

The central figure in the story "Eveline" lives in the state of deprivation determined by the failure of faith, hope, and love in the triad of earlier stories. She is the first of the characters in *Dubliners* to attempt, in the course of any story, to escape from Ireland and cross the water to a far country and new life; and she is the last. Her situation is unique: innocent of sin, yet old enough for independence, she is morally free enough to escape. But she lacks the necessary moral force. Offered a life in Buenos Ayres by a young man, a former sailor, who loves her, she consents to leave her home and her drunken, abusive father. But at the North Wall, due eastward from the center of Dublin, the black ship appalls her, and she clutches the iron railing in frenzied fear of drowning. Her fiercely energetic action is symbolic of her moral paralysis, an inability to move to the baptism of the night journey over water and the communion of love in a new life. And at the same time it is actual arrest. At the end, Eveline is "passive, like a helpless animal," as if soulless, paralyzed by fear. Lacking the

virtue of fortitude that strengthens the soul for compliance with the dictates of reason, she must turn back from danger and from life. Her plight exemplifies the state of the soul enclosed in the barren homeland because it is too weak to cross the threshold of the east.

With "After the Race," the concourse of sins commences, inevitably with the sin of pride. The suppression of the soul that in "Eveline" caused its withdrawal from action and reduced the girl to the semblance of an animal, is seen in this fifth story to have opened the way for an extraordinary ebullience of material energy. The sweep of movement is greater than in any other story: it begins far to the west of Dublin and ends in Kingstown Harbor. Thus pride comes out of the west, the direction contrary to the vital east. Both physical and financial power are depicted in exaltation, most compellingly in the central symbol of the opening scenes, a costly motor car, "a swift blue animal," which by exacting response from "the machinery of human nerves" reverses the roles of man and mechanism. The hero of the story, Jimmy Doyle, is a grey-eyed young man with a brown mustache, colors identified with the symbolic opposites of sea and land and defining precisely his spiritual condition, between the poles of good and evil. In him the state of the soul that has lost its virtue and stands at the threshold of sin is represented. His disposition toward pride is indicated early by his pleasure in the notoriety brought by his riding with wealthy foreigners in the car, and later by his feeling "the lack of an audience" when he finds himself in glittering circumstances aboard a yacht. His parents feel "a certain pride" because of his associations with the men and names of foreign cities. His triumph is accompanied by the sound of music: motor horns, gongs of trams, singing, and the piano music of a penniless Hungarian. It culminates in a night of card-playing and drunkenness aboard a yacht that rests nightlong on the symbolic waters of a harbor. The stationary voyage ends in stasis and stupor. Jimmy, like Eveline, resembles in the end a paralyzed animal.

The degradation of the soul continues in "Two Gallants," with a disreputable sexual adventure in which money is the primary object. As Levin and Shattuck have pointed out in their essay, the "fine decent tart" whom Lenehan covets and Corley enjoys is a debased Nausicaa, princess of a seagoing people and befriender of Odysseus. The tart wears clothing suggestive of the sea, a blue serge skirt, white blouse and sailor hat, and a black jacket with mother-of-pearl buttons; and her eyes are blue. The impression is complicated by other details: at her bosom are red flowers, stems up, inverted perhaps to symbolize

her barren nature, and her slack mouth with projecting teeth lies open, monstrously. She is not wholly a succoring princess, though Corley relies on her for goldpieces; she is no angel of the waters, but a gutter sprite. Corley's first encounter with her, begun "under Waterhouse's clock," included a walk beside a canal and an excursion into a field in Donnybrook, through which flows the Dodder, of ugly associations in "An Encounter." Accompanied by Lenehan, Corley goes from Rutland Square, at the top of O'Connell Street, through the center of Dublin and southeast to Hume Street to meet her, then, leaving Lenehan, east with her to Merrion Square, where they board the Donnybrook tram that carries them southeast. Lenehan retraces his path across Dublin, turns west at Rutland Square, and circles back to his rendezvous with Corley. On the way he stops for a solitary meal of peas and ginger beer, and to meditate the possibility of marrying for money. He meets Corley, who displays in his hand what he has obtained from the tart, the gold coin, final object of his symbolic communion, the body and blood of the sacrifice counterfeited in gold. For both men the essential value in life is money, and their sin is avarice. The soul's primary movement in this story is southeastward to the debased substitute for communion and the symbolic waters, then westward in a partial return. Secondarily, as the movement of Lenehan, it is a circular motion about the center of the city.

The circular motion of Lenehan prefigures the confinement of movement in the next story, "The Boarding House," in which all the action takes place in the house, in Hardwick Street, just north of Rutland Square. There the soul is arrested, virtually at the center of Dublin. In "The Boarding House" the main concern of the minor characters is money, for which a mother sacrifices her honor and her daughter's virtue, and for which the man they trick goes unwillingly into the bondage of marriage. The object of his lust, the sin which he has confessed to a priest, is "a little perverse madonna" whose eyes are "grey with a shade of green." Glimpsed in her role of temptress, she wears a "loose open combing jacket," and the virgin white of her instep appears against the animal fur of her slippers. The symbolic indications of her relation to the spiritual orient are exact: her virginal aspect is vulgarized and contradicted, and her eyes tinged with pool-green symbolize at most the sea's ambivalent margins. She is the foam-born goddess of earthly love, a debased Aphrodite, as Levin and Shattuck have shown her to be in the Homeric parallel also. Her temple is a boarding house which is beginning to acquire "a certain fame" and which is managed by a woman referred to by the boarders

as "the Madam." Though her lover thinks of escape, he is constrained by social pressures, by concern for his business position, and by uneasiness about his sin. Longing "to ascend through the roof and fly away to another country," he descends to the parlor to agree to the marriage. The suggestion of upward motion toward the spiritual orient is countered by an actual downward movement toward the secular substitute.

The limitation of movement in this story is an emphatic expression of a new stage in the unifying action of the book. For the impulse to move eastward beyond Dublin is reduced to a fantasy, and it is never after this point restored, except in "A Painful Case," and then only to be suppressed in revulsion. In "A Little Cloud," the eighth and central story of *Dubliners,* the fantasy is continued in Little Chandler's brief dream of literary success, which is engendered by his envy of his friend Gallaher, who has become a journalist in London. Nursing a vague hope of visiting London as a successful poet, Little Chandler walks toward the fashionable bar where he is to meet Gallaher, going east and southeast, down Capel Street and across Grattan Bridge over the Liffey, the route that Lenehan followed in the second part of his circular stroll while waiting for Corley. Like the sun god of myth, Gallaher has blue eyes, though his are not perfectly blue, and his gold watch and "vivid orange tie," twice mentioned, suggest the glow of the god. Dazzled, and warmed by his heavily watered drink, Little Chandler timorously enjoys his brief communion, at the same time painfully considering the injustice of the contrast between himself and his friend. At home, he regretfully contrasts the composure of his prim wife's eyes with the Oriental eyes of Jewesses available to Gallaher. When the crying of the baby breaks into his reading of Byron, he rebels at his hopeless imprisonment in "his little house," and shouting at the child he frightens it into paroxysms. It is almost beyond doubt that he has come home to this defeat across O'Connell Bridge and past Rutland Square; for, as we have seen, the likeliest location of his home is in the neighborhood of Eccles Street. He has probably made a circuit coinciding almost perfectly with Lenehan's movement about the center of the city.

A similar circling occurs in "Counterparts," the next story, when after leaving the office in Eustace Street the central character, Farrington, goes eastward to make the round of the bars, from Davy Byrne's south of O'Connell Bridge to Mulligan's somewhat east of it. The circling expresses his true desire, for he has come in anger and revulsion from the office, where he has been humbled by his superior, Mr.

Alleyne, and he goes home, eastward to the suburb of Sandymount, with the bitterest loathing. The vital image toward which he is impelled, but without hope of attainment, is a woman with a London accent, wearing a peacock-blue scarf and gloves of bright yellow, the orient colors of sea and sun. But her eyes are brown, and he encounters her in Mulligan's in Poolbeg Street just east of the center of Dublin. Farrington's whole desire is concentrated upon central Dublin, where he hopes to restore his sensations of power and self-esteem, through drunkenness, sexual conquest, and a display of physical strength. But he is overcome in a show of strength, and his money runs out before he can accomplish his first two objects. In Sandymount he vents his anger and asserts his superiority by caning his little boy. His story shows the weakening of the disoriented soul as sin more and more alienates it from God.

In the next story, "Clay," the drift of the soul toward death begins. The central character, Maria, journeys away from the waters, symbolized by the *Dublin by Lamplight* laundry where she works. In this curious name, suggesting soiled water and artificial light, baptism both as washing and as illumination is implied. The barmbracks cut and served for tea by Maria are an intimation of the host, divided before the ritual and mechanically apportioned, exactly four pieces to each woman served. Both of the chief sacraments are represented in the symbolism of the false orient of the soul at which Maria's journey begins. The sacrament of marriage is represented by the ring mentioned by one of the laundresses, a Hallow Eve charm which Maria desires but never receives. Maria is a tiny, disappointed spinster with the grey-green eyes that combine the symbolic colors of sea and stagnant pools, appropriate for a laundress. Riding the tram from Ballsbridge to Drumcondra, she goes from the southeastern suburb, through the center of Dublin, to the northern suburb, stopping at the Pillar in O'Connell Street to buy gifts of food for her relatives. On the ride to Drumcondra, her spiritual inclinations are emphasized by her encounter with an ambiguous figure, a half-drunk elderly red-faced stout man with greyish mustache and brown hat. When he makes room for her to sit down she contrasts him with the young men, who have ignored her. The three topics of his conversation, Hallow Eve, the rain, and the food in her bag, are reminders of the three sacraments earlier represented. Maria's pleasure in him is misplaced, for she receives nothing from him. Instead, she suffers a loss. In her happy confusion, she forgets her package of plumcake. Or perhaps he actually steals it. The suspicion, coupled with his stoutness, his

drunkenness, and his talk of the enjoyment of food, is enough to associate him with the sin of gluttony. Amid the heavy emphasis upon food and drink throughout the story, Maria appears almost abstemious. Her downcast shyness and wistful disappointment in her lonely life seem evidence that her soul's defect is gloominess, the sin of tristitia. The impression is strengthened by her turning somewhat westward, away from the orient. She is ready for death, as her touching the clay in the Hallow Eve games intimates.

James Duffy, hero of "A Painful Case," actually lives in the far western suburb of Chapelizod, though he is a banker in Baggot Street in southeast Dublin. He lives "without any communion with others," withdrawn even from himself, thinking of himself in the third person and the past tense, somewhat as if he were no longer in life. His sin is sloth. Yet he interrupts his deathly abstraction by an intellectual intimacy that carries him eastward to Dublin concert halls and to the southeastern seaside suburb of Sydney Parade into the home of a Mrs. Sinico, blue-eyed, the neglected wife of a sea captain. When at Duffy's insistence upon the soul's loneliness she makes a gesture of affection, he withdraws from her in fear and rectitude and so deprives them both of the communion of life. Years later, reading of her drunken death, perhaps suicide, he hastens in revulsion from Dublin to Chapelizod, but is drawn eastward again to the western edge of Dublin, the scene of his last parting with her in Phoenix Park. It is a movement toward life, in yearning for contact, but though the name of the park suggests a resurrection, he finds there only a final realization that he is "outcast from life's feast," from communion. Aware of his responsibility for Mrs. Sinico's death under the wheels of a train, he wanders in his lonely night, turning his eyes first to the sea-grey river "winding along towards Dublin," eastward; then to its contrary image, a far freight train "winding out of Kingsbridge Station, like a worm with a fiery head winding through the darkness, obstinately and laboriously," westward. He hears its rhythm repeating her name. His sense of guilt, the image as of a worm of death and hell, and the heartlike thud of its noise in his ears, combine in an impression of his identification with the destroyer. Turning homeward, he will go in the same direction as the train. It is a symbolic movement of the soul toward death, a suitable conclusion of the action in sin that began with a proud eastward plunge of mechanical energy.

Hereafter in *Dubliners* the disoriented, unregenerate, unnourished soul, alienated from God by sin, acts only at the center of paralysis and looks beyond it only toward death. The characters in the last four

stories move no farther to the east than the central areas of the city, they depend on the meager resources of life in Dublin, and their aspiration toward vital satisfaction beyond the present time and scene is directed to a future that has the aspect of the dead past.

In the three stories of public life that follow "A Painful Case," the culminating action occurs in one building or another within three quarters of a mile of O'Connell Bridge, approximately the center of Dublin. In "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," the uneasy canvassers for the Nationalist candidate Tierney assemble to wait for their uncertain payment at the headquarters in Wicklow Street just south of the Bridge. Here the political life of the city and of the country as a whole is focused with symbolic force. The aged caretaker who tends the unwilling fire and sets out the bottles of brown stout has "moist blue eyes" and a mechanically munching mouth, and the canvasser O'Connor who sits with him has grey hair and a pimply face. Before the other canvassers return, a man with a brown mustache and raindrops on his hat, Joe Hynes, not of their group, steps into the room and twice asks, "'What are you doing in the dark?'" Candles are lighted, the physical darkness is diminished; Mr. Henchy enters, and Hynes remains long enough to defend the right of the working-man to run for office and to condemn both Tierney, whom no one trusts, and the English King, whose visit to Ireland Mr. Henchy approves of because it will bring "an influx of money." The ambiguous figure of Father Keon appears, dubiously suggestive of priest and actor. His "very bright blue eyes" and rainwet face like "yellow cheese" give him the symbolic aspect of the orient god of the sun. Though the impression is modified by the quality of the yellow, it is strengthened by the "rosy spots" on the cheeks and by the shining of his buttons in the candlelight. His black clothing may symbolize the night sea, or the divine darkness, or the darkness of evil and death. He is called a "black sheep" and he goes to transact some business with a politician at the *Black Eagle*. His refusal of light on the dark stairs, where he "can see" to descend, suggests self-generated light, like that of the sun or of God. These and other indications in him of obscured divinity give him the aspect of a spiritual power in decline. Thus he is a symbolic apparition of a force supplanted by the present leader Tierney, by King Edward VII, and at the end of the story by Parnell, whom Hynes returns to praise in a poem as "Our Uncrowned King." Led by Hynes, all look to the political force of a life that has vanished in the past. Admired by all, Hynes' poem represents the hope of Ireland as dependent upon the resurrection of the betrayed leader, compared to

Christ and the Phoenix, in a world manifestly as barren of justice and as hostile to spiritual life as when he was "slain."

In the thirteenth story, "A Mother," the center of action lies somewhat farther to the east, in the Antient Concert Rooms on Great Brunswick Street, less than half a mile southeast of O'Connell Bridge. Mrs. Kearney, the main character, has lost all traces of an early superficial affinity for the east, symbolized by her "ivory manners" as a girl and by her habit of "eating a great deal of Turkish delight." She respects her brown-bearded husband for his solid fixity, which gives her a sense of security. She turns the Irish Revival to her daughter's advantage by having her taught Irish as a means of advancing her popularity. She cultivates Nationalist friends and musical friends, with the effect of establishing the girl's reputation in Dublin musical circles as a pianist with pleasing personality and the right outlook. When given an opportunity to manage her daughter's talent, she is energetic and able. But upon the esthetic and financial failure of a series of concerts for which her daughter has been engaged as an accompanist, she ruins the girl's career by an unreasonable, intemperate concern for money and a display of ill feeling, bad taste, and manners anything but ivory. The fecklessness of the management, the mediocrity of the performers, the indecorum of the audience, and the cupidity and uncurbed passion of Mrs. Kearney reveal the disabling deficiency both of force and of control among those concerned with the arts in Ireland. The esthetic life of Dubliners is symbolized by an apparition, the wraithlike figure of a soprano, Madam Glynn, imported from London to sing at the concerts. Her appearance as of one "resurrected from an old stage-wardrobe," the faded condition of her blue dress, and her "bodiless gasping voice" suggest the vanquished life of a former time. In the ghostly image the remoteness of the symbolic east and the feebleness of its influence are made apparent.

At the beginning of the fourteenth story, "Grace," which was for a time the final story of *Dubliners,* the principal character, Mr. Kernan, is seen at the end of a drunken bout, in degradation and immobility, "quite helpless," lying "curled up at the foot of the stairs down which he had fallen," on the filthy floor of a basement lavatory in a bar in south central Dublin. After his fall—not from grace, for that has occurred long before, but from the dead level of decency in Dublin—he lies as if paralyzed, or as if dead in the womb of earth awaiting a call to resurrection which he can hardly expect to profit by. The story ironically represents the futile efforts of Dubliners to elevate him. In the bar he is rescued by Mr. Power, a fair man in a yellow ulster, the

color of orient light, but without a trace of symbolic blue about him, and taken across Dublin to his home on the Glasnevin Road, the northwest outskirts. Glimpsed in his seat on the car, as it nears O'Connell Bridge at the heart of the city, Mr. Kernan appears as if in his original attitude on the floor, though set upright, "huddled together with cold" before the biting east wind that blows upriver from the sea. In his bedroom, two days later, he is seen in much the same position, "propped up in bed," while his friends plot to "make a new man of him" by persuading him to join them in a retreat, to confess his sins, and renew his "baptismal vows." His wife has denied him any of the stout served to his friends, but when he consents to join the retreat a neighbor, fair-haired like Mr. Power, suddenly appears with a bottle of "special whiskey," and all join in a round of drinks. The group look to the past, praising "the old, original faith" and old-fashioned education, and final plans are made for the retreat. Mr. Kernan refuses, however, to hold a lighted candle in the ceremony, and in doing so he symbolically rejects illumination. In the final scene, in the Jesuit Church in Gardiner Street, three quarters of a mile north of O'Connell Bridge, the friends are led by a priest, whom they rightly characterize as "a man of the world like ourselves," to the happy discovery that the attainment of grace requires of them no thought or act in the least contradictory of their worldly wisdom or more regular worldly behavior. While the casuist in the pulpit attacks the foundations of the cardinal virtue of prudence, or wisdom, Mr. Kernan and his friends kneel in the symbolic attitude first defined in his position amid the filth and ooze of the lavatory floor. Earlier Mr. Kernan, a former Protestant, having erred in a reference to the body of a church, has called it the "pit," as if he were thinking of a theater. But his tongue has found the word for *hell.* Obviously appropriate for the lavatory, it characterizes a church like that in which these Dubliners are last seen, kneeling in the polysymbolic attitude of drunken paralysis, of shrinking from the breath of the soul's orient, of the sickbed, and of supplication that we know to be hopeless because it is directed to the god of this world, the "mammon of iniquity" named in Father Purdon's text.

After this story, anything further might seem superfluous. The paralyzed soul has come to a dead halt, the end of its divagations, before a lifeless altar at "the centre of paralysis." Joyce may have asked himself, however, what would happen if the dead should recognize and accept their death. Whatever else the final story of *Dubliners* may be, it is an answer to this question. Recognition and acceptance

would bring liberation, though not into life, and movement, though not to the east and not of the body. This story, "The Dead," shows a new development in *Dubliners,* a mitigation of the punishment of the enclosed and paralyzed. The physical movement of the main character Gabriel Conroy from a house in the western part of the city eastward to a hotel at the every center expresses in spatial terms his commitment to the ways and the doom of his fellow Dubliners. His spiritual movement westward, in imaginative vision, symbolizes his transcendence of that doom through recognition of its meaning and acceptance of the truth of his inward nature.

But this is the conclusion of the action of a long story. When first seen, coming in from the night, his clothing dusted with that symbolic snow the deathly import of which has been noted often, Gabriel brings a "fragrant" breath of chill air. He seems to represent in a vivid image the "dead" of Dublin who are foregathering in a house on Usher's Island, nearly a mile west of O'Connell Bridge, the home of his aging spinster aunts and cousin, who are giving their annual party for their friends and their music pupils. Gabriel is dissatisfied and uneasy, and he longs for the pure snowy air on the quay. In part he is pressed by his responsibility as toastmaster with a speech to make in praise of the tawdry artificial little world of his cousin and his kindly, moribund aunts. In part he is pained by a sense of his own futility and falsity. Attacked playfully as a "West Briton" by brown-eyed, Irish-speaking Miss Ivors, because he is not enthusiastic about his country and plans a vacation in Europe rather than the Aran Islands, Gabriel answers, "'I'm sick of my own country, sick of it!'" Like the characters in the earlier stories, he longs to escape out of Ireland. His difference is that his deep inclination is toward the west rather than toward the east. When he looks toward the snowy night or thinks of walking upriver from Usher's Island, in Phoenix Park and "the white field of Fifteen Acres" at its center, it is not only the night and snow that allure him but the west itself.

Galway and the Aran Islands are not far enough, however. They represent the goal of the one Dubliner, Miss Ivors, who will not be wholly identified with the group at the party. Though constricted by her insistent overemphasis upon Ireland, she is honest and warm. The symbolism of color discriminates her from those Dubliners who are not only constricted in their life but corrupted by it. Mr. Browne, tediously insisting that he is "all brown," is not really so: he wears a "green overcoat," the color associated with symbolically stagnant water, and its "mock astrakhan" trimmings further define his false

orientation. It is Miss Ivors who is "all brown," all Irish. Her refusal of supper is a rejection, symbolically, of communion in the house of the dead. Leaving the party early, she walks home alone, up the quay, westward, going the way of Gabriel's desire, though not to his ultimate goal.

Gabriel remains to preside at his aunts' table and to praise the ladies of the household and their preservation of the old-fashioned Irish hospitality, and to discredit the present "less spacious age." Thus the past is opened before him as a pleasant prospect, sentimentalized, suggesting also, however, changes and "absent faces" of the dead, from which he feels it proper to turn again to "living duties and living affections," to the present scene that is dominated by the "Three Graces of the Dublin musical world." Gabriel's fulsome exaltation of this feeble trinity shows his insensitiveness to the life of the present.

The music of the past dominates the night, moreover. In conversation the guests have dwelt upon great singers of the past, Italian and English, performers hardly to be matched in the present day, except, as Bartell D'Arcy insists, in London, Paris, and Milan. And as the company disbands, toward dawn, the music of the past is sounded by D'Arcy's tenor voice, singing a song "in the old Irish tonality." For Gabriel and his wife Gretta it is arresting. He is "surprised at her stillness" as she stands listening. Shadow darkens the ruddy colors of her skirt to black and white, the earthly terra cotta, and the salmon pink that suggests, however obliquely, the sea and the return of life from the sea to the land. She is an ambiguous image. Colors of land and sea appear also in her bronze hair and blue hat. To Gabriel she suggests a picture, which he would entitle *"Distant Music."* It calls him both toward her and to their past, their youth together. While they ride toward the hotel where they will pass the remainder of the night, waves of joy break upon his memory like "fire of stars," and he imagines the "old rattling box" of the cab is carrying them eastward out of Ireland "to catch the boat, galloping to their honeymoon."

Just before leaving his aunts' house Gabriel has revealed exactly the nature of the escape he is launched upon. Walking round and round in the hall, he has mimicked the action of an old horse, trained to the treadmill, that when driven in the streets has perversely circled around a statue. Gabriel has just finished a speech in praise of the past, to which all monuments are built. In the cab, which he believes will carry him to a renewal of old delight, he is going forward only to a travesty of the dead past, found as if by traveling in a circle. Such

movement, constricted by conventions of the soul, is really spiritual arrest, the psychic paralysis of the treadmill, in *Stephen Hero* aptly described as a "stationary march."

In their room, in the Gresham Hotel on the east side of O'Connell Street not far north of the Bridge, Gabriel dismisses the porter and sends the candle with him. Perhaps his wish is to be lighted only by the fire of his joy. But a "ghastly light" of the street lamp lays a long streak from the western window to the locked door; the blasting light of Dublin illumines the room. Turned there to the past, in hope of resurrecting his life by embracing his wife in the spirit of their early days of marriage, Gabriel does not understand that in having "escaped from their lives and duties" he has rejected the present and moved toward death. And he discovers too late that his wife has made a similar movement away from life, but not toward him. Stirred by D'Arcy's song to her own memories, Gretta like Gabriel has turned to the past and given herself to the image of love there. But what she remembers is a grave, that of the boy Michael Furey, who she believes died for her. Moving away from their present life, which has not sustained them spiritually, the living are not united, for their motion is toward diverse goals, not merely to the dead past but to separate graves.

Quieted by his realization of his own unimportance, in lonely shame and humility Gabriel stretches himself by his sleeping wife and, thinking of his aunts and their approaching death and of all the dead, he feels the fading of his own identity into vagueness. Looking westward from the window, watching the snowfall that covers Ireland with waters frozen to stillness, he feels that "his journey westward" is imminent. His thoughts carry him to the central plain and hills and the Bog of Allen, still, turf-colored water, and farther, in transcendence of that stasis, to the Atlantic ocean, "the dark mutinous Shannon waves" receiving the falling snow. As his soul swoons in his vision of a universe of snow, Gabriel senses in the oblivion of its descent the unity of the fate of "all the living and the dead." In recognizing that fate as universal, his also, Gabriel is restored to the community of men by his acceptance of the communion of the shades.

Though Gabriel's enlargement and liberation in his final vision is not a restoration to life, it is an achievement of true dignity and beauty. The one comparable attainment in *Dubliners* occurs in "Araby," where the way of release into life, as Joyce conceived it, is adumbrated in the only action of the book that is creative. By acts of invention, by transmuting an earthly love in worship and ritual,

a boy attains for a while some measure of religious satisfaction. But his experience is mainly compounded of imaginations and delusory expectations, and he is entirely alone and unsupported. Finding his idol inadequate to sustain him through all assaults and frustrations, he conceives of no other. He is like Gabriel, the potential artist confined and disempowered in Dublin.

The spiritual way of escape and attainment, only intimated in *Dubliners,* is fully defined in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* in passages not unrelated to these stories. With a priest of the Church who is merely "schooled in the discharging of a formal rite," Stephen Dedalus contrasts himself, "a priest of the eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life." The consummate act in the *Portrait* is Stephen's creation of a work of art. In a series of developments symbolized by images of generation and of sacred rites amid the cloudy flush and afterglow of a dream or vision of waves of light, the words of a poem flow into being in his mind. Here is the process whereby "the uncreated conscience" of his race will be forged. It is a ritual from which the work of art emerges, as the consecrated Host emerges from the ritual of the Mass, to be used for the redemption of the soul from death and the replenishment of the world with life.

The nature of this most vital action of the soul is made more fully apparent in the immediately following scene of augury. Watching the circling flight of swallows, Stephen is reminded of the flight of Daedalus out of captivity, symbol of his own escape from Ireland eastward over water. In the wanderings of the "birds ever going and coming, building ever an unlasting home under the eaves of men's houses," he seems to find a symbol of constantly renewed creative action and of that ceaseless motion of spirit like endless waters out of which invention comes and which beauty can evoke. Lines of Yeats about the wandering of the swallow over waters stir his life as in an earlier scene it was stirred by a girl—in her power not unlike the Irish madonna of "Araby"—standing beautiful, and birdlike, in midstream, stirring the water of the tide to motion and music. The meaning of that visionary image of beauty in action is disclosed in Stephen's dream that follows in response to it. The dream is of unfolding subjective light, flooding in waves, seeming to be simultaneously a world and a flower and a sea flushing with dawn, a complex of symbolic images like the orient goal of *Dubliners* that has the aspects both of another land than Ireland and of an eastern sea and that is at the same time a state of the soul in fullness of life. The vital condition of

the soul thus envisaged is the opposite of the soul's paralysis. It is a state of change in manifold movement, a flowing transmutation of multitudinous form as in the "hitherandthithering waters" of *Finnegans Wake* and in the tidestream stirred by the girl's "foot hither and thither."

Suggestions of such spiritual fulfillment in motion of a subjective light that is like water are to be found in *Dubliners* in Gabriel Conroy's joy, compared to a "wave," and in the images of his past delight that "burst like stars" and "broke upon and illumined his memory" while his illusion held that he and his wife were moving "with wild and radiant hearts to a new adventure." The parallel in the *Portrait* is striking: while Stephen, awaiting the augury, stood repeating the words of Yeats, "a soft liquid joy like the noise of many waters flowed over his memory. . . ." Gabriel's mind, like Stephen's, appears to have been stirring with the promise of life, before he turned to the past, away from the vital east. Perhaps even in the last moments of his decline he might have turned round and moved eastward if his spirit had been stronger. For as "his soul swooned slowly" into the vagueness of the snow and watery darkness, it was being freed of the "nets" of Irish ways, like that of Stephen Dedalus entering the dreamed watery light, whose "soul was swooning into some new world, fantastic, dim, uncertain as under sea. . . . Glimmering and trembling, trembling and unfolding, a breaking light, an opening flower. . . ." Failing to attain the freedom of that light, Gabriel escaped into darkness.

Clearly the escape from Dublin is not to be conceived of finally as a passage beyond physical enclosure, but as a transcendence of psychic constrictions, an attainment of that full motility of the soul which is the reverse of its paralysis. The nature of Joyce's later works of fiction sustains this view. For the scene of all is Dublin, and all develop in one way or another the theme of wholeness in spiritual fullness and freedom. In the character and experience of Leopold Bloom, "all-roundman," sensitive observer in whom there seems to be "a touch of the artist," wanderer and "waterlover," the attainment of wholeness is less approached than suggested. Not alone by Bloom, but in the very texture of *Ulysses,* is forefigured that universal being embodying our collective humanity which in *Finnegans Wake* Joyce represented in the forever renewed activity of a single character in whom all are comprised. In the interlinking formations and resolutions of meaning in flow that present the history of this being, Joyce offers to every reader, if only in the mode of esthetic understanding, a realization of life integrated in one continuing act of changing and inclusive vision,

a vast epiphany and a communion in which all may share. Thus in *Finnegans Wake* the resurrection and the life denied to almost all of Joyce's characters, found only briefly by the artists and the young, is discovered in the movement of the everliving spirit of humanity. *Ulysses* approached this development. *Dubliners* began it, in a single symbolic structure consubstantial with a full-bodied naturalistic narrative defining at once the symbolic method of Joyce's successive masterpieces and the grounds of his mature vision. The revelation thus presented is of the whole moral action of the soul in Dublin moving from the beginning to the end of its tortuous course between the poles of life and death.

BARBARA GIBBS:

Poems as Redemptions

JOSEPHINE MILES: *Prefabrications.* Indiana University Press.

I would like to give some impression of my delight in reading these poems, of the sense of *person*—of a particular intelligence and a particular, lively set of feelings, which radiates out of them. I'm quite willing to have it understood that what I like best about them is what they *say,* though not to have it thought that I thereby derogate from their manner of saying. *Prefabrications* is Miss Miles' fourth book of poems. This in itself should warn us that she is a formed and practised lyricist. And indeed, as one would hope and rather expect, these poems say what they have to say with the utmost ease, boldness, economy—qualities which intensify at times to clairvoyance.

Let me begin with a poem—there is nearly always one (at least) in a book of poems—which images the complicated relationship between the writer, his subject matter, and the form. In this case I choose "Bibliographer":

> Bad quartos were my first love.
> Ever since,
> I have worked in the particular possession
> Of their providence.
>
> Though increasingly wild the world
> And as death corrupt,
> My first love brings me succor
> As I learn its script.
>
> So that, in my presence,
> Rank and complete

Spoil and error
Are not really dissolute.

I will take them up
And gently gent-
Ly love them, tell them
What they have probably meant.

The statement is almost too clear for comment, but I will risk being obvious: the primary engagement is one of love (which, of course, cannot be accounted for, *e.g.,* "my first love"); the object is "bad," "wild," "corrupt" (like "the world" and "death"); the action is, again, to love; but the manner of it is to "tell them/ What they probably have meant," *i.e.,* to purge of corruption through sympathetic imagination, interpretation, statement; in the process the object is redeemed, becomes "not really dissolute"; and finally, the whole activity provides "succor" for the poet in a wild world.

But lest it be taken that I impute a Christ-complex to Miss Miles (any more than to any other poet, since I suppose that the idea of redemption is almost inseparable from the idea of the poetic act) I will hasten to quote another poem, "Charity":

Charity, of which is spoken
Much great language, sometimes I think I know
Your aspect in a diffused light, the wide
Brow of pity and enanguishment.

But more I haspen to the narrow harm,
The dim blind, the deep certitude,
The self-and-thievish presence which can prove
Not the demeanour but the conceit of love.

Then perhaps all I have to say of Miss Miles to distinguish her from some other poets on this point, is that she proclaims "love"—rather than hate, fear, contempt, distaste, moral outrage—to be her primary engagement and her action, and that she assumes love to be as capable of insights, of fine and hard-won distinctions, of intellectual honesty and effort, as the sharper passions. The book amply proves the assumption if it be in need of proof.

Before I go on to give one or two examples of the "redemptions" that delight me, I will mention my one quarrel with the book—its title. I would have liked it called quite boldly *Redemptions*—or at least by some title less brittle, modern, limiting than *Prefabrications.* The force and quality of the poet's style deny anything *pre* about it, give the reader in every line the pleasure of the creation, as though it were happening now, under his eyes and in his ears. The poems are indeed *fabrications,* as poems should be, but couldn't be less cut to a standard, to be taken apart here and put together there, for miscellaneous uses. Nor are they fugitive, as the title suggests. Slight as are their surface pretensions, they might be built of marble, for finality. Now the wryness, modesty, fun-poking spirit of the title are indeed qualities to be found inside, and there is also inside a reference to "prefabricating panels" among other aspects of our civilization. As regards subject-matter the title is apt and

fully supported. It is only in its punning aspect, as a description of a product (the poems), that it seems to me to do injustice to the book, and perhaps advertise falsely what are the book's anything but slick and machine-made contents.

As for the book itself, what I want mostly to say is "Read it." I like nearly all the poems. Their variety and consistency are breath-taking. I will mention especially the two or three longer poems which could not, in any case, be quoted —"Two Kinds of Trouble," "City," "Ten Dreamers in a Motel." They are hard, deep and fine poems. And to conclude, I will quote two of the shorter lyrics—not as "examples," since nothing in this book is an example of anything else—but for the reader's and my pleasure.

The Plastic Glass

A saint I heard of saw the world
Suspended in a golden globe; so I saw
Shattuck Avenue and the Safeway Stores
In Herndon's globe of friendly credit.

And where the car moved on, there the whole trash
Flats of Berkeley floated in suspense
Gold to the Gate and bellied to the redwood
Cottages.

And I would ask the saint at what expense
This incorporeal vision falls to the lay mind,
And search the breast
For revelations of unquietude.

But in this dear and christian world the blessing
Falls not from above; the grace
Goldens from everyman, his singular credit
In the beatitude of place.

Find

Diligent in the burnt fields above the sea
The boy searches for what, sticks,
Cans; he walks like a rider
The rough and stumpy ground.

And finds all morning while the sun
Travels to crest, a blooming fullness of day,
Just one ant-paste spike, rusted.
Says the boy with relish, *Poison.*

Often at night his fears have told him these
Dooms to find in the hills, and his heart lightens
To find them there in fact, black as intended
But small enough.

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